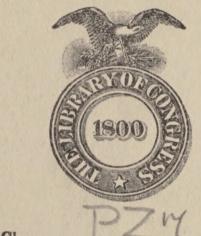
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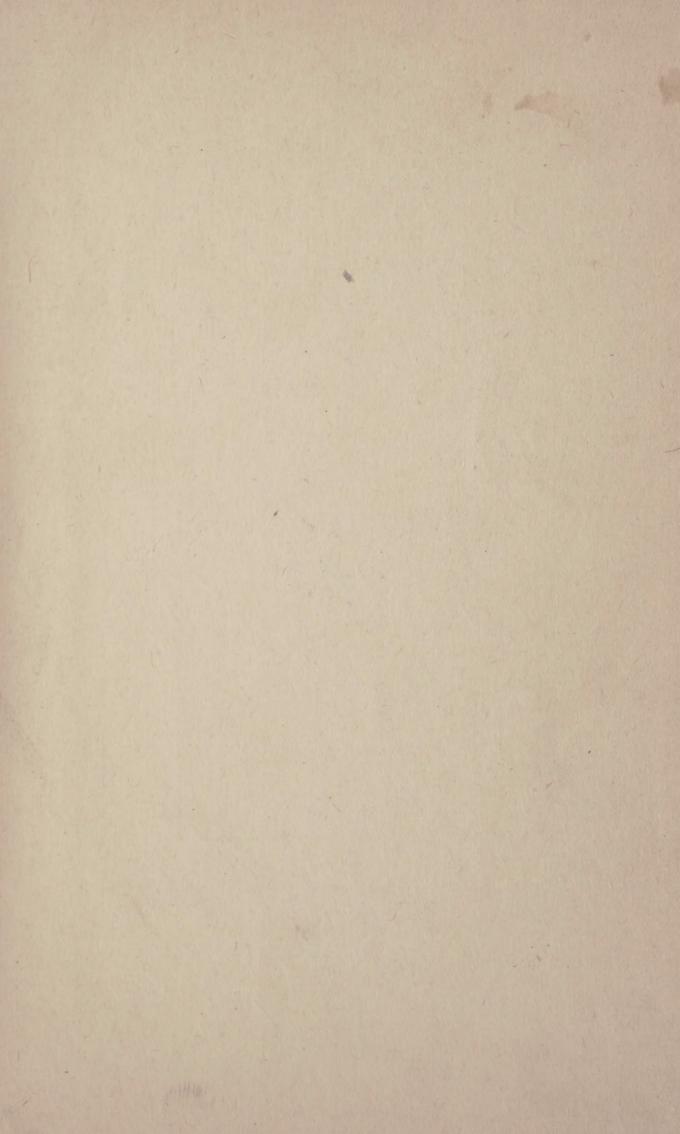
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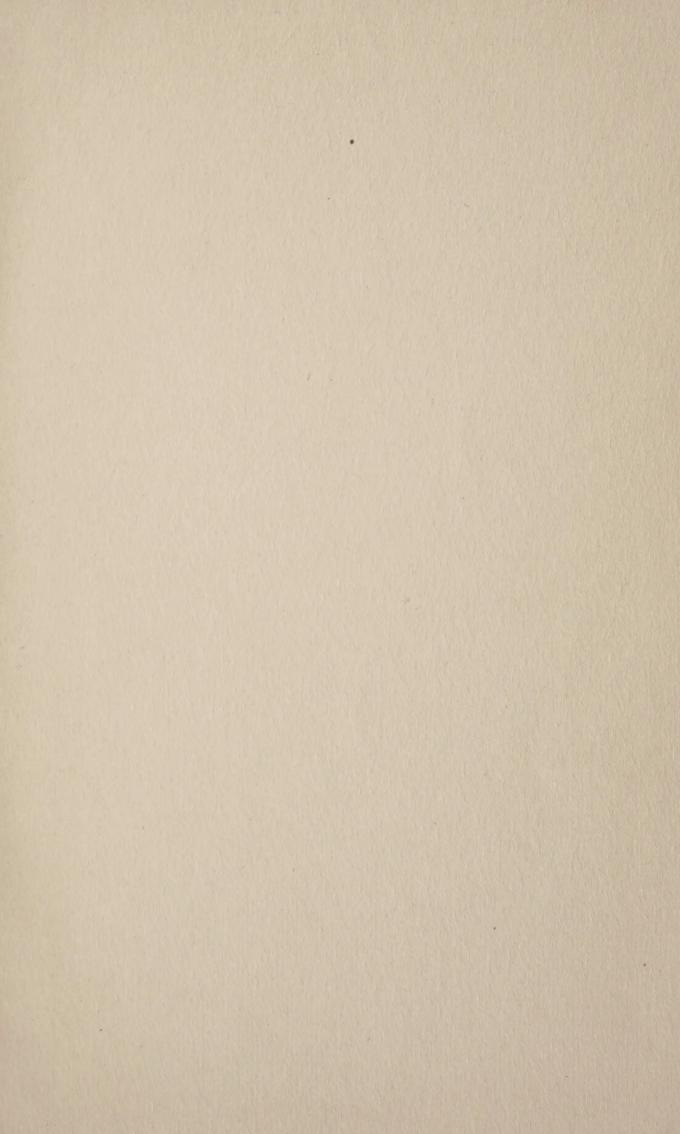


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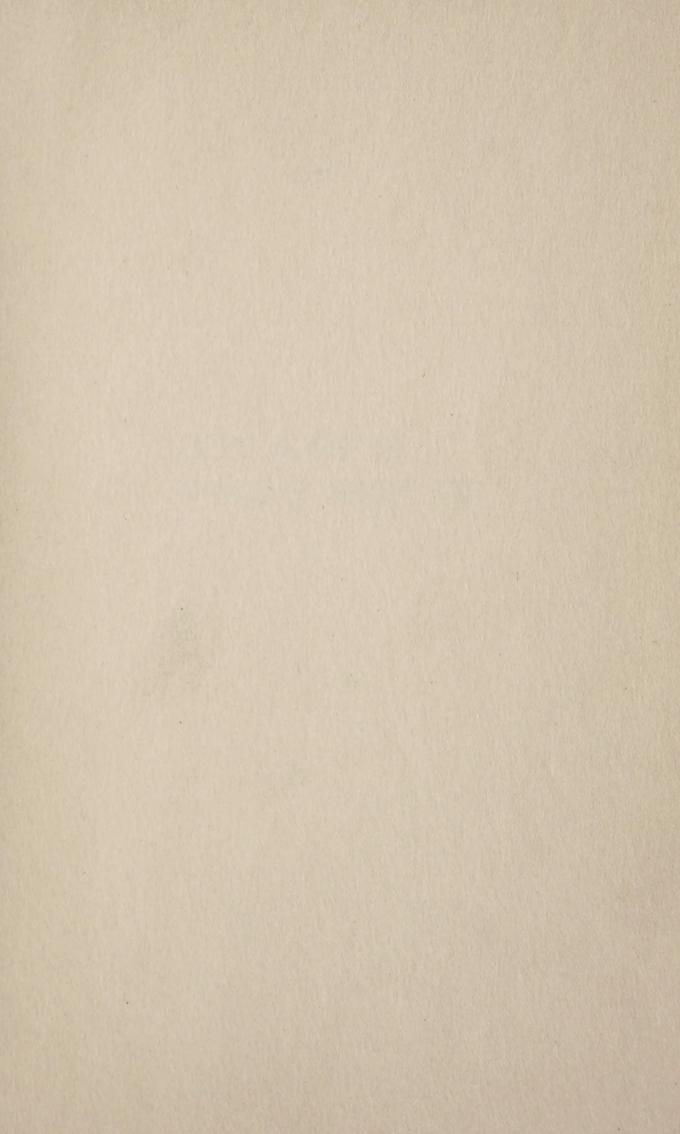
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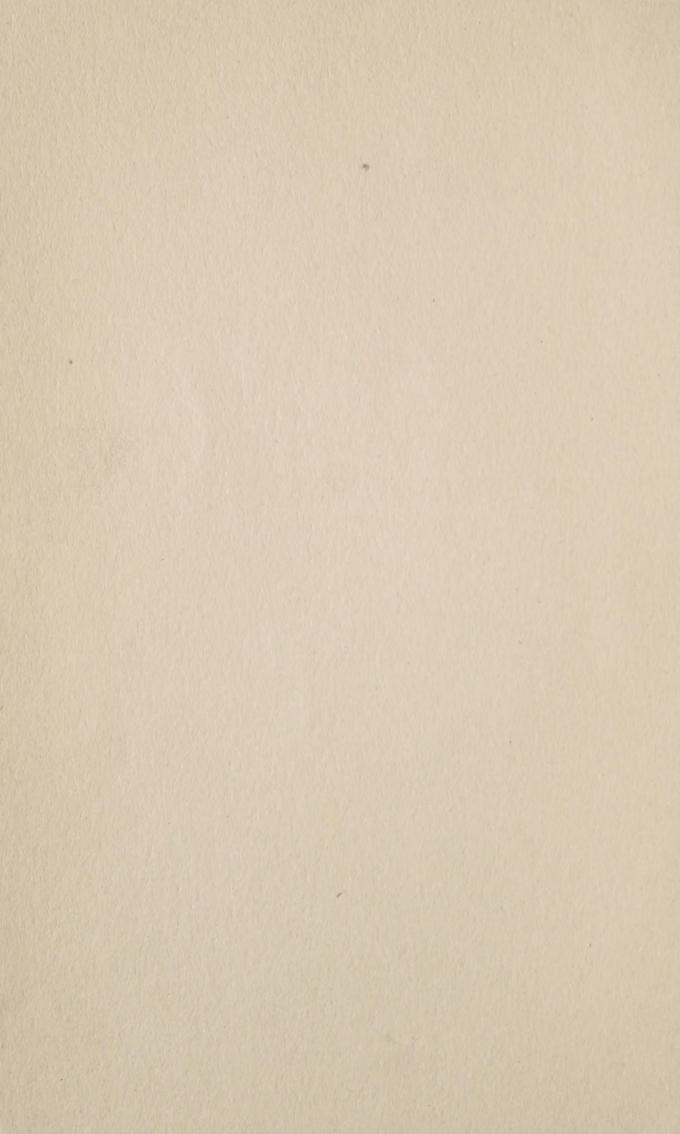
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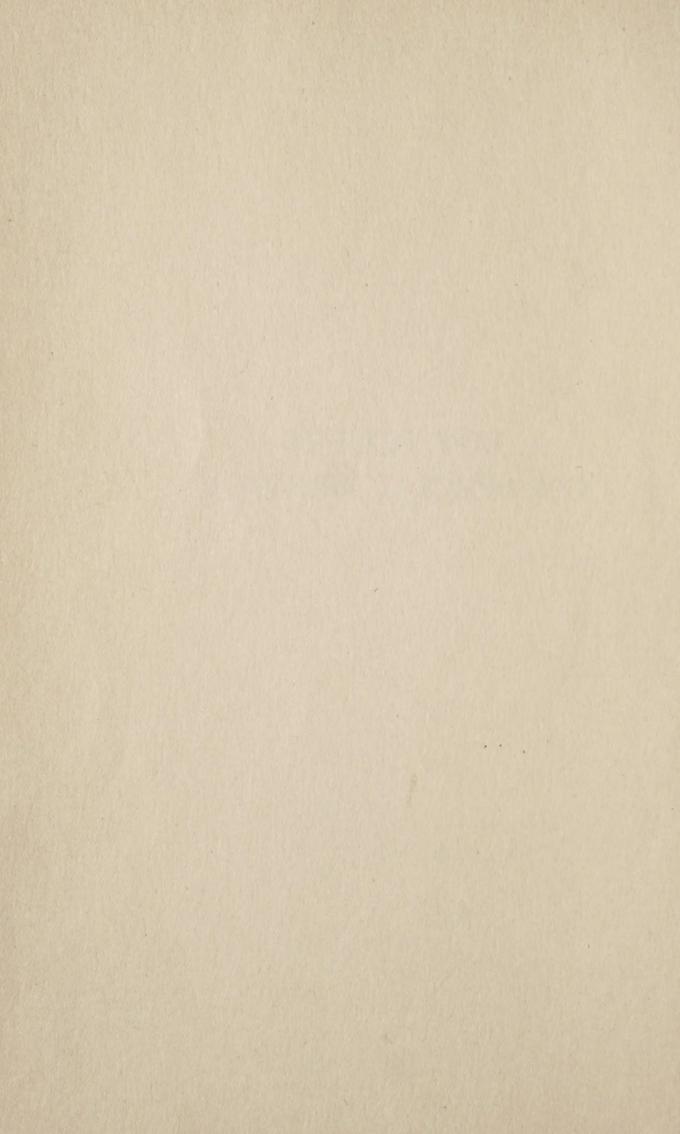


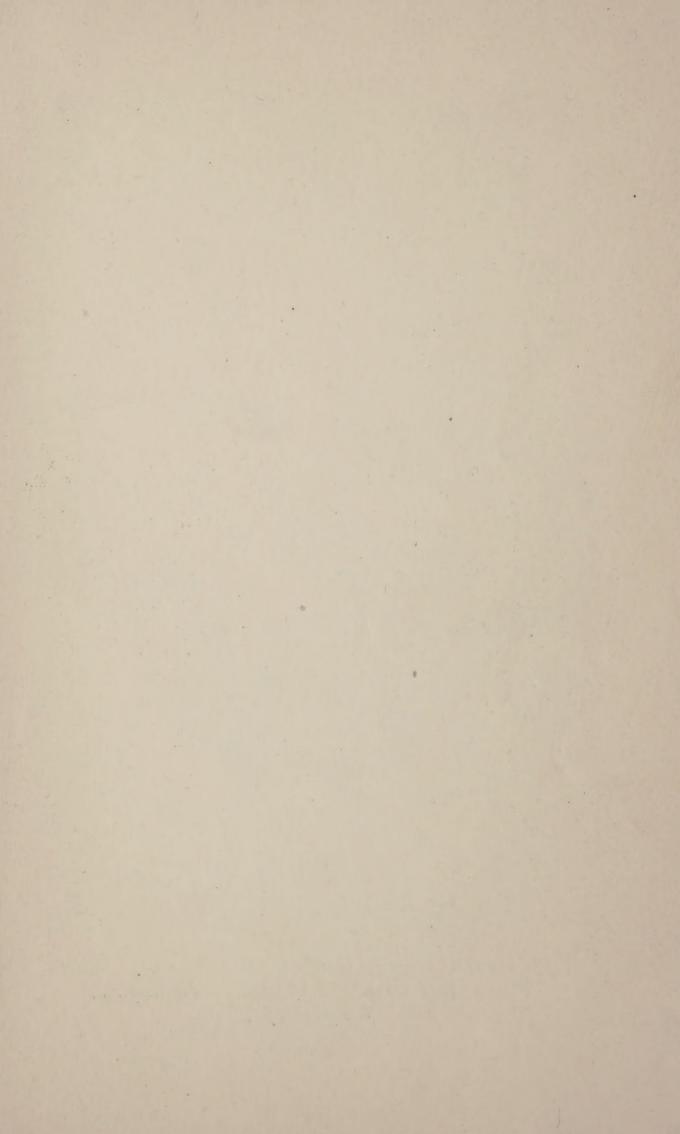






BOY SCOUTS ON SPECIAL SERVICE







THE LITTLE SPEECH SEEMED TO GIVE THE CROWD SOMETHING TO REFLECT UPON. Frontispiece.

See page 175.

BOY SCOUTS ON SPECIAL SERVICE

BY

CHARLES HENRY LERRIGO

With Illustrations by George A. Newman



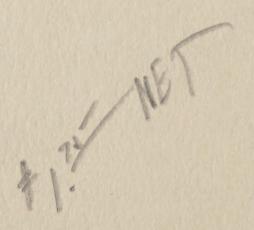
BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1922

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Published September, 1922



PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

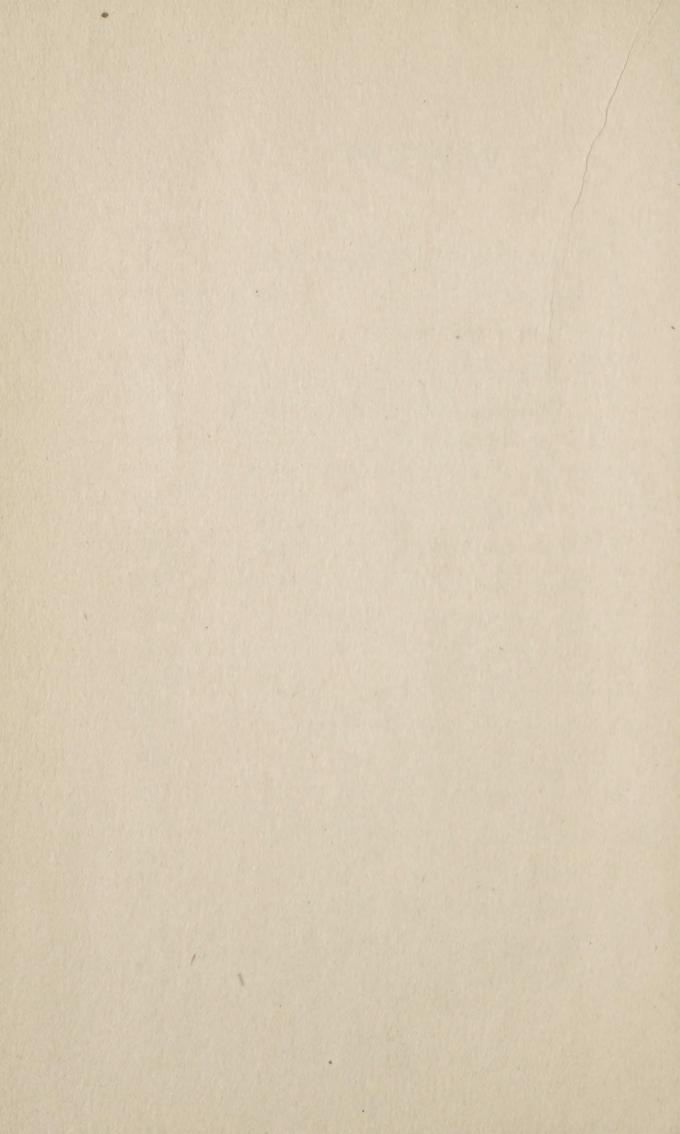
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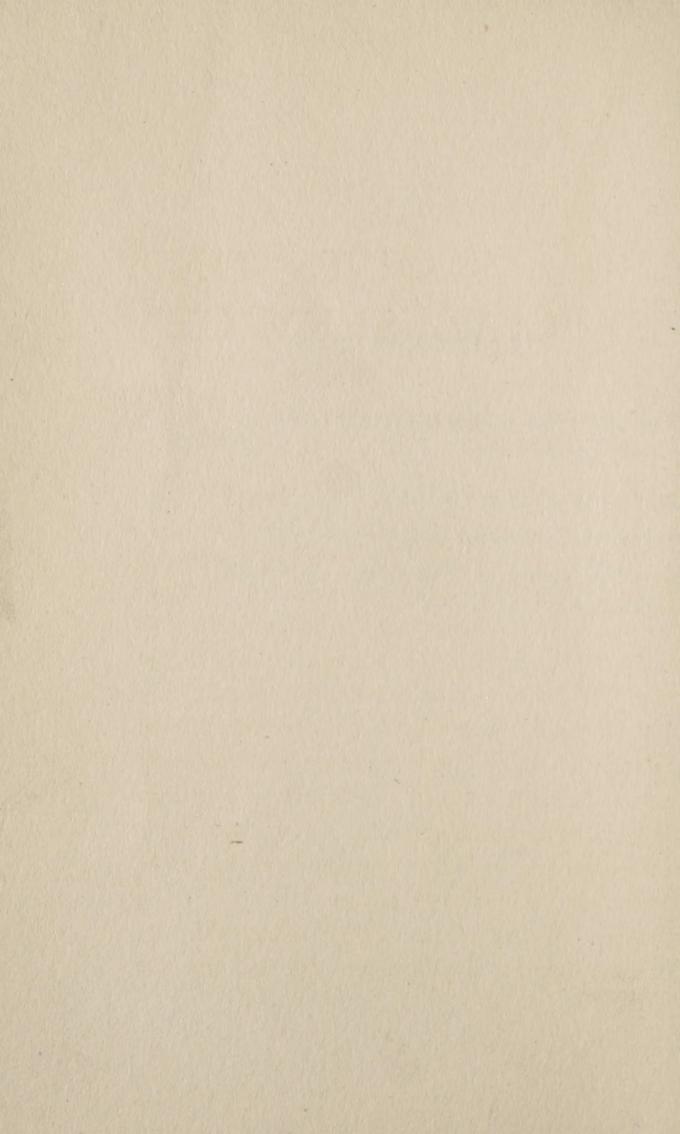
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BOY SCOUTS ON SPECIAL SERVICE

CHAPTER I

FATHER AND SON REPORT TO HEADQUARTERS

Perhaps the reason Billy Ransom thought so much of Maytown was because he was born there. At one period of his young life he had believed it to be the largest and most important city in the world. Later on he had learned better, for not only had he studied geography and history but his own travels had shown him larger cities. But although he was nearly fifteen and a sophomore in Maytown High School, he still cherished a great faith in his own town and desired no greater fame than to be famous in the eyes of its citizens.

Since Billy had been a little boy he had seen a lot of improvements in Maytown. He had seen the

new city hall go up, and also the Maytown hospital. The city library had been moved, within his knowledge, from two rooms over the fire station to its own nice building of stone and brick veneer. He was a charter member of Maytown Troop 3 of Boy Scouts, and patrol leader of Antelope patrol. And Troop 3 had a building of its own. It was quite small and of frame construction, but none the less it made good scout headquarters.

In the spring of 1917 when all the world was at war, one of the great disappointments that came to Maytown was its inability to have its own regiment, or at least a full company. But the best that could be managed was to swell the complement of a neighboring town.

Troop 3 felt this very keenly. So far as they were concerned they were ready for any service. Their chief activities were running errands for the Red Cross, but this did not satisfy them. They wanted to do something unique. They were anxious, both as individual scouts and as a troop, to be Boy Scouts on Special Service.

Billy had one qualification that he felt sure would be of great value if it could be put to practical use. This was his knowledge of the French language. He had been encouraged by his father, Doctor Ransom, to take good advantage of such opportunities as were offered, both in study classes and in personal relations with the two French families who lived in Maytown, to improve his use of the charming but mysterious language of France. This was partly because Billy's aunt, who was Doctor Ransom's sister, lived in France. She had married a young French surgeon, who had taken her to live in Paris. In expectation of visiting their French relatives at some near future time, all of the Ransom family cultivated the French language.

Years ago Billy had made a lucky find in the way of a chum. He had discovered that the busy doctor who was his father was intensely interested in all of his doings and always ready to join in them so far as professional duties allowed. Possibly Doctor Ransom was no better in reality than most fathers, but the difference lay in the fact that Billy had actually discovered how good a chum his father could be and ran to him with every item of interest, just as a matter of course. The doctor appreciated this, and, busy as he was, he saw that the boy was seldom disappointed.

So when it came to these exciting war times, and the wild urge to get into things stirred in Billy's breast, just as it did in some millions of other boys in the land, the first person in whom Billy confided was his father.

"I'd have been awfully disappointed if you hadn't felt about like that, Billy," said Doctor Ransom. "That's just the way I feel myself. I may have to go away from here before the war ends and get closer to it. I'm too old to get into the fighting, just as you are too young."

"I'm pretty nearly fifteen, dad," said Billy.
"And I'm growing awfully quick."

"This country doesn't need you boys who are 'pretty nearly fifteen' in the fighting lines, Billy, but it needs you awfully much in many other places. I'll tell you what let's do, Billy. I'll ask the American Red Cross to use me the most they can in war work, and you ask the Boy Scouts of America to do the same thing by you. Let's both write letters to our headquarters, this very day."

Billy's letter had to go clear to New York City; the doctor's only to Washington. Nevertheless, Billy was the first to get a reply.

"Your letter written in behalf of Maytown Troop 3, and endorsed by your scoutmaster, exhibits the spirit that we want to see all through this land," wrote the Chief Scout Executive. "There is important work for every scout, in this

crisis. It will be so diversified that I cannot in this letter begin to outline all the fields in which your work may be required. The first thing is to see that every boy of scout age is enrolled and in good standing. This is recruiting time, right now! Let Maytown Troop 3 see to it that no boy is slighted. Fill up your troop! When that is done you will be ready for orders".

Billy read the letter at the next scout meeting, and Troop 3 proceeded to draw the net. "Let no worthy boy escape," became their motto. Instead of meeting only on Friday nights, they held meetings on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and at every meeting they discussed prospective members, acted on the names of candidates, and laid plans to enlist those who were especially stubborn.

Billy brought in four new members in the first week. The troop soon had enough candidates to fill all the vacancies in the old patrols and cause them to plan a new one, which they named Tiger patrol, in advance, because its members would all have the fighting spirit.

"You've been trying to make a scout out of Buddy Seldem for about three years, Billy," said Lafe Rider. "Get him to join the Tigers and tell him that maybe the fellows will choose him for patrol leader, since he's such a bloodhound."

"I've tried, but I can't get him yet," admitted Billy. "He says he's after the real thing. He doesn't want any Boy Scout business in his."

"What does he mean by the real thing?" asked the scoutmaster.

"Oh, Buddy's bound he's going to be a hero," replied Billy. "His lanky body has shot up so high that his brains have found hard work to catch up. He's six feet tall right now, and to hear him talk he's more of a man than anybody in six counties."

"Talk is the word!" interrupted Lafe. "I've heard Buddy talk. He's sick of this place. He's sick of a town that doesn't even have a regiment of its own. He's sick of being called Buddy. He's a fighter from away, way back. He's going right to war and he's going to win the D. S. C. and all kinds of decorations. When he comes back home, he'll have enough military hardware so he'll be able to start an exhibition case in the city library."

"I wonder if Buddy knows that the kind of valor that wins the Distinguished Service Cross is seldom distinguished by talk," said the Scoutmaster. "Don't give him up yet, Billy. There's nothing

wrong about this desire to be a hero. You'd like to be one yourself, wouldn't you?"

Billy's color ran a little higher than usual.

"Yes, sir; I surely would. I reckon I was born a few years too late to be a hero in this war, though, so I'll just have to be content with being a good scout. I'll keep after Buddy. He's too young for soldier work, according to my dad, and I guess dad knows."

"I venture to predict that he won't be more of a hero than you fellows, no matter what he does," prophesied the scoutmaster.

Billy went after Bud Seldem again.

"Better join us, Buddy," he urged. "You know you can't enlist in the army. Even if they would take you, your folks wouldn't give permission."

"Folks nothing!" said Buddy contemptuously. "Who's going to ask any folks? When a fellow looks like he was eighteen they don't bother about his folks. You're just a kid, Billy. You don't understand. Go on away and play Boy Scout again."

He turned scornfully away and Billy walked home to take counsel with his father about this hard situation. But when he reached home he found the household all excitement. Something had happened that drove all thought of Buddy Seldem out of his head. Doctor Ransom had received a commission from the American Red Cross, with the rank of major, and was ordered to prepare for immediate service in France.

"You can't go to France without me, dad," cried Billy. "You know you admitted yourself that my French is a lot better than yours. You'll need me the worst way."

"But I'm afraid I'll have to get along without you, Billy, much as I'd like to have you go. I suppose you'd be perfectly safe in Paris with your aunt, and then there'd be nothing to keep mother from spending the time of my absence in Florida with grandma. But I don't believe even a Red Cross officer can manage to take his family with him."

"But you can try, dad," said Billy. "Promise me you'll try. Oh, it would just be too bully for anything if I could go with you."

"And what about me, Billy?" asked Mrs. Ransom.

"Oh, I'd be awfully sorry to go away from you, mother. But you know how you've been saying grandma needs you. And you'd have a dandy time

in Florida. Please say that dad can try to arrange for me to go."

"Trying's all right, Billy. But it's a wild idea. They just positively don't do such things."

"But I can be a real help, father. I've been spending a good part of every day with Monsieur Ouimet for a long time, and he says I talk like a native. I'm sure the Red Cross people need interpreters."

"Probably, Billy. But it's just like the army. They want a little maturity, too. They don't want boys."

"But do try, dad. Just say that you have a son who is good at French and will make a good interpreter for you, and also look after your clothes and errands and cooking. You know I passed my cooking test, and I could always get you something good to eat."

"I fear they would not even be persuaded by that, Billy. It isn't quite as strict a matter as the army, so I will try; but don't have any great expectations. I wouldn't try at all, but I know that you really can be useful, and your Aunt Ella will be very glad to have you stay with her in Paris, now that Henri is at the front."

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"Henri" was Aunt Ella's husband, Major Deschamps, an officer of the French army.

"Won't it be fine if I can, dad," cried Billy in rapture. "And wouldn't it be just too awfully splendid for anything if we could both get to go across on Uncle Edwin's ship."

"You are letting your imagination run into fairy visions, Billy," said Doctor Ransom gravely. "They are quite unwarranted. I shall make an effort, as I have promised, but you may as well understand that there is only the remotest chance that it will be successful. If you have the sense of a good scout you will just make up your mind that you can't go."

But for once Billy refused to be sensible.

CHAPTER II

GOING OVER

Billy Ransom did get to France, after all. To this day very few persons know how it was accomplished. Perhaps it was because in those early days of America's entrance into the War everything was in confusion. Perhaps because Dr. Ransom was in urgent demand over there for important Red Cross work and desired very much that Billy should be allowed to visit his French relatives. Perhaps the fact that Billy's own Uncle Edwin was in command of the transport counted. Perhaps it was all these things combined. Anyway, the fact remains that Billy Ransom got to France, and that while there he wore his Boy Scout uniform and was often taken for one of Des Eclaireurs de France, which is the way they speak of French Boy Scouts. The Boy Scout uniform being much the same the world over, it was not difficult for Billy to look like a French boy.

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Dr. Ransom and Billy had been assigned a stateroom on the hurricane deck. But a very seasick lieutenant was discovered for whom no stateroom accommodations had been made. So Billy, eager to help, took quarters with the enlisted men of the 199th in Section Lower C.

Lower C housed 180 men. To reach it you went to the "fore well deck", entered a hatchway, and went down two decks. Its light all came from the overhead hatch or from electric lights. Its ventilation was carried on by means of two great canvas ventilators that ran through to the upper deck. Its furniture was nothing at all but wooden bunks—long rows of them—in double tiers, with an occasional aisle so that it was possible to get in or out of a bunk without climbing over too many neighbors. There was not a chair, not a table, not a washstand. Washing and shaving were done in a big wash room amidships.

Eating was done on deck, wherever one could find sitting or standing room, after having stood in line for his turn at the big cooks' galley on the fore well deck. No eatables were to be taken below decks, except in very severe weather.

Now there was a place reserved for Billy Ransom next to his father, the doctor, in the officers' dining saloon. But after the first day that place was vacant. Billy, with his father's permission, preferred to mess with Section Lower C. He had 180 bosom friends in that section within forty-eight hours, and there was never any trouble about finding him an aluminum cup and mess kit.

Billy liked that aluminum mess kit. He quickly learned how to take his "slum" in the meat can and slip the flat cover back along the handle, where it made an excellent plate for bread and prunes. He hooked the handle of his cup over his belt and used it to hold water instead of the coffee which was the universal drink of the men. There was plenty of food, and if it were not well-cooked or so nicely seasoned as that served in the officers' mess, it found no carping critic in Billy Ransom.

The study of French was one of Billy's most important tasks. He was very sure that if he were to be of any use to any one in France, it would be because of his ability to use both languages. One of the ways in which he made himself popular in Section Lower C was in giving elementary instruction to a large, informal class, in the use of simple French nouns and verbs.

Many of the soldiers who did not enjoy regular classes would cheerfully join in such a class as

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Billy conducted and profit not a little thereby. They would squat around on the deck or loll against the ship's rail, chairs being absolutely unknown articles to the soldiers traveling on army transports.

"Tell me one good French word, Billy," one boy would say. "My girl says she knows I'll never learn a single word of French. I'm going to show her when I get back."

"What kind of word would you like?" asked Billy.

"Oh, any word that I can use a lot!"

"That's the stuff, Billy," shouted a chorus. "Teach us some words that we can use a lot."

"All right," Billy responded. "The French word for 'a lot' — and it is used a lot all over France — is spelled b-e-a-u-c-o-u-p, but it is pronounced bo-koo. Get it — bo-koo?"

"Bokoo," rolled up a mighty chorus. "Bo-koo! Do you speak French? I do! Bo-koo! meaning a lot. Bokoo! Bokoo!"

"Tell us 'Howdy' in French, Billy."

"What the French really say isn't 'How do you do?' but 'How do you go?' They say Comment allez-vous? The way they usually speak it, you will probably think they say 'ko-man tully voo'."

"Say that again, Billy."

- "Ko-man tully voo."
- "That goes, fellows. After this, no 'Howdy', remember. Everybody in Company B says 'Koman tully voo.' Now all together Koman tully voo!' Fine work!"

It really was fine work. A French cook put his head through an open port on the hurricane deck and shouted:

- "Très bien, merci! Et vous?"
- "What did he say, Billy. Tell us what the Frenchy said and what it means," shouted the crowd.

"He was replying to your question in the French way. He said 'Very well, thanks.' Then he added, as the French are always particular to do, 'And you?' meaning, 'And how are you?'"

This was not so easy. There was a laughing disposition to make *très bien* sound like "three beans" But the boys who made sincere efforts soon mastered the phrases.

When the men of Section Lower C were assigned for boat drill they were given places on the port side of the "boat deck", so that their trip to their proper station, at the signal "abandon ship", led them from the lowest position to the highest. But they were wiry animals, one hundred and eighty bunches of American vitality, with muscles and joints flexible and elastic, yet firm with the even quality of tempered steel. After one or two practice trips, it was their proud boast that every man of Section Lower C was in his place in less than four minutes after the alarm was sounded. The "abandon ship" drill came every morning, usually just before morning inspection. In practice drill the call was six blasts of the ship's bugle, but it was understood that for a genuine alarm, the six blasts would be sounded by the ship's siren.

This was the time when the German submarines were at their worst. Hitherto they had been unable to destroy an army transport. But it was well known that great rewards were offered the submarine commander who could accomplish this feat.

So the "abandon ship" drill was no idle ceremony. A real danger existed and must be guarded against. Life belts were issued to every man, and when the drill signal was sounded, each one jumped for his life belt and ran to his station.

"I think, Billy," said Dr. Ransom, "that you really ought to be stationed with me at this 'abandon ship' drill."

"But, father," objected Billy. "I'm bunking

with the men in Section Lower C; isn't it better for me to go right along with them?"

"I suppose it is, my boy," admitted the Doctor. "I would like to have you with me, but the other does seem better. Remember, Billy, if there ever should be a real attack, and a real 'abandon ship' alarm, don't forget to signal to me, and don't forget that I am depending upon you to act the man."

"No, sir," Billy promised, "I won't forget."

There came a morning when Billy was awakened by Sergeant McGiffon so early that the faintest glimmer of the dawn had not yet crept down the hatch.

"It's daybreak, Billy," said the Sergeant. "Come up on deck. There's something to see."

Billy jumped into his cap and shoes, the rest of his clothing being already on, and followed to the deck.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Look around and see if you can find out."

Billy peered eagerly through the gray light of the early dawn. A few lengths ahead he could see the flagship of the convoy. To port he could make out three other transports. On the starboard side, there were five, and five were in the rear. It was about

the order in which the convoy had been running from day to day.

"It's fine to look at," he said, "but I don't see anything new."

"Go see if you can borrow your father's field glasses and then look," suggested McGiffon.

By the time Billy returned with the glasses the sky had brightened. Off in the distance he could see with the naked eye a cloud of smoke that did not come from any vessel of the convoy. A chilly feeling crept along Billy's spine, a peculiar dryness came into his mouth and throat. He leveled the field glasses at the black object with hands that trembled.

Then he gave a great shout of exultation. "It's a destroyer, Sarge," he cried, "and it's flying our colors!"

"Sure it is!" responded McGiffon. "Look a little to the east and you'll see two more of them. Off to the west I can make out three, and back of the convoy two more. They say there are ten altogether."

"Ten destroyers to look after this convoy! They're taking pretty good care of us, Sergeant. I suppose we're pretty safe, now."

"We are and we aren't. When you see destroyers around you, it is a safe guess that you are where

they are needed. We're in the danger zone now, and shall be until we get pretty well into port."

There was nothing in the danger zone that looked different from the course they had been traveling. A few of the older men and officers may have felt some concern, but most were joyously anticipating an early landing, and finding in the patrol of destroyers a new diversion. There was even some grumbling at the new orders that every man should wear his life belt constantly and should not remove any clothing when lying down to rest.

By dinner time the excitement had pretty well worn away. After eating, Billy went below, his eyes heavy from lack of sleep.

Most of the bunks were occupied by men trying to make up lost sleep so that they could be fresh for landing.

Scarcely had Billy stretched himself in his bunk when there came a tremendous crash. It was a terrific, tearing, rending noise as if the ship were being wrenched asunder. The vessel actually stopped. She listed over as if some great monster of the deep were tipping her up.

There was a moment of horrible silence, then came a terrible babel of voices, shouting, calling, pleading, commanding. One officer was shouting orders to close the bulkhead doors, another was detailing men to guard the hatches. Men were shouting: "What is it? We're hit!"

"We're sinking!" They were grabbing for their packs and overcoats. There were signs of panic.

Suddenly, above the tumult, came the six deafening blasts of the ship's siren, sounding the first bona fide abandon ship call.

Instead of adding to the excitement, it gave confidence and quiet. Here was something definite to do. Every man was to go immediately to a certain definite place, carry certain definite equipment, and be ready to perform certain definite duties when so ordered.

In a second, Billy was jumping up the hatch, one of a pyramid of men, with Sergeant McGiffon at his elbow. In three minutes every man of Section Lower C had found his place. In another minute the whole seething mass of men had taken their stations, and quiet and order prevailed on that mighty vessel.

Billy's first act was to jump up and wave his handkerchief in the direction in which he knew Dr. Ransom should be. An answering wave assured him that his signal had been seen, and that all was well.

Across the bows of the vessel darted the gray shape of a destroyer, P. 37, discharging depth bombs in the direction where the submarine had disappeared. From the sky above two seaplanes were active in their operations. Billy was afraid, but he fought to keep all trace of it from his features. He would have given a thousand dollars for the press of his father's hand. But he had promised to act the man. So he kept a steady lip and did not even grip Sergeant McGiffon's arm.

The vessel still floated. It was possible that she might make land. Two destroyers detached themselves from the convoy to give her their special attention. They signaled that oil and wreckage from the submarine gave positive evidence of its destruction.

Darkness began to fall. The other vessels in the fleet faded into the distance. The sea became rougher. It was deemed safest to transfer the soldiers from the transport to the destroyers by means of the boats.

Billy continued to play the man. Even when he saw that one destroyer was to unload the port side and the other the starboard, thus putting him on a separate vessel from his father, he refused to give way to his distress.

22 Boy Scouts on Special Service

He sat very still in the bow of the big boat and watched his comrades of the 199th, new to the task, work hard with the great oars. The evening gloom was gathering fast, and he did not know what the darkness held for him. Would he ever see home again? Would he even see his dear father again? He bit his lips and clenched his fists to keep down the expression of his fears.

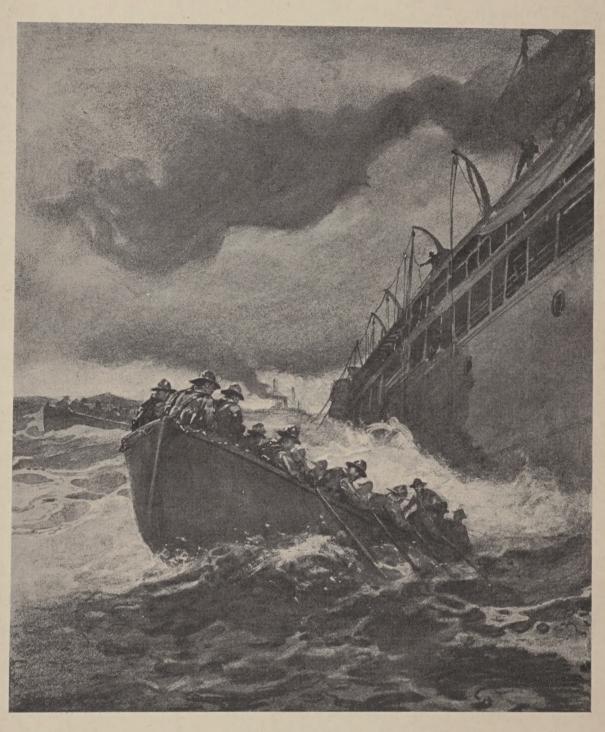
But Billy Ransom had been charged to act the man, and as he fervently prayed to his heavenly Father for support, so he tried to act as he knew that his earthly father, in another boat not so very far away, would be acting.

It was quite dark when their boatload, the very last, was safely transferred to the deck of the destroyer, and there followed many hours of tossing over a rough sea before they at last reached land and were allowed to disembark.

But when Billy ran down the gangplank it was to rush into his father's arms, and his joy was great enough fully to compensate for past terrors.

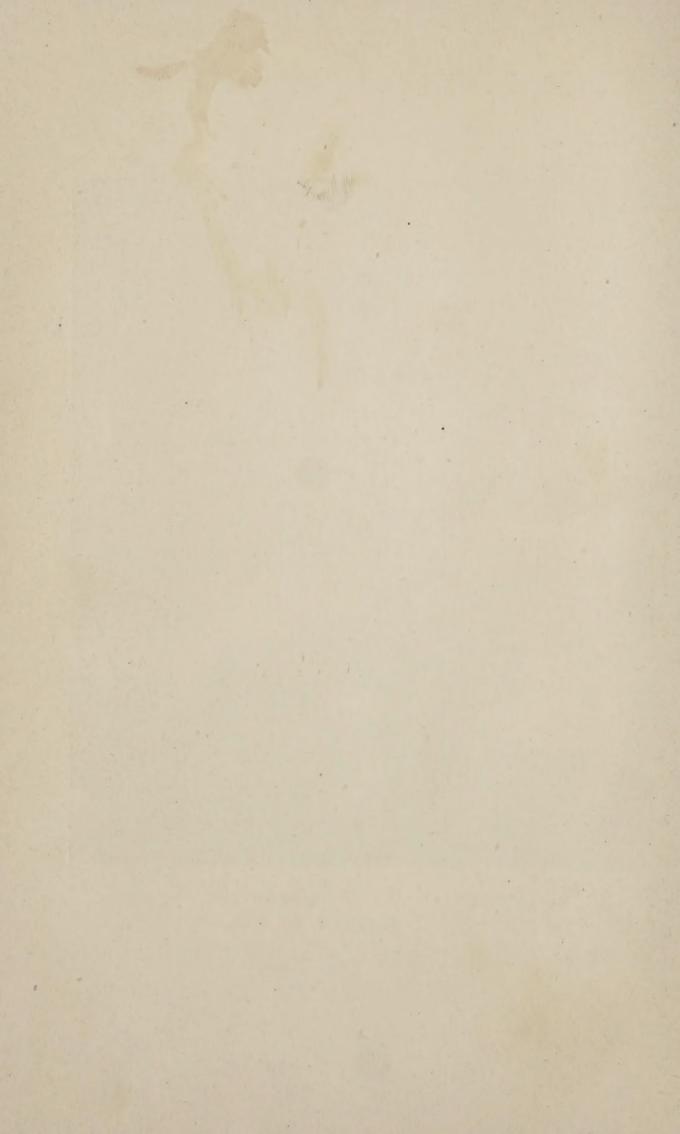
"Did he act like a man?" asked Dr. Ransom.

"As good a man as there is in the 199th," replied Sergeant McGiffon. "Billy can talk like a Frenchman, but when it comes to action, believe me, that boy Billy acts like a real American."



BILLY SAT VERY STILL IN THE BOW OF THE BIG BOAT.

Page 22:



CHAPTER III

SECRET SERVICE

Safe in France, Billy Ransom was taken by his father direct to his sister in Paris.

Madame Deschamps had a pleasant apartment on Rue de la Madeleine, and since this is almost in the heart of Paris, there was no difficulty in finding it.

Madame Deschamps, who was more familiarly known to Billy as Aunt Ella, was expecting them and gave them a royal welcome. But her husband was not there to greet them.

"Henri has had many things to do for his country right here in Paris," she explained. "He has been content to do them and leave the work at the front to younger men. But surgeons became so scarce that he felt he must go, and it is just one month since he left us to take charge of an ambulance at the Château d'Epernay."

Billy knew that the French speak of a field hospital as an ambulance, and that the work his uncle

had gone to do was important and strenuous work. But Billy was sorry to miss the genial French doctor whom he had learned to like so well during his visit to America. It was one of the hard things that had become a part of the War, this separation of friends and relatives.

"I'm hoping for a chance to go up there myself," Aunt Ella told them. "Henri promised that if there was any possible chance he would work me in."

This was rather disquieting news for Dr. Ransom, who had counted on the Deschamps home as headquarters for his boy, but Billy thought very little about it. He was old enough to look after himself. There would be plenty of places where he could make himself helpful. After all, he had crossed the sea to do something, not just to look on.

Billy found even war-time Paris an amazing place. There were evidences of war in plenty, for the streets were filled with soldiers arrayed in so many different styles of uniforms that one wondered how many Allied armies there were. Nevertheless, there was tremendous activity apparent in business life. The big stores were thronged with people; and the little stores, too, seemed to be awhirl with activity.

There were people who spoke English well almost everywhere in Paris. But Billy would not allow himself to depend upon them. He made it his business to speak to the French in their own language, to do his buying in French stores, to think of his purchases in terms of French money. He went to a teacher for an hour every afternoon and was assured that he was making good progress.

Billy did not find so many Boy Scouts here as he had seen in England, but discovered that his scout uniform was sufficiently familiar in France to excite no comment. When he visited Red Cross Head-quarters with his father he found there a great many scouts in uniform. They were acting as messengers and porters chiefly, though some were doing the work of clerks. They were quite excited at seeing an American Boy Scout.

It happened that the sirens sounded the alarm for a German bombing attack while Billy was making his visit. The French boys carried him away to their shelter in a basement, at the top of which was a sign

ABRIS

30 PLACES

He knew that the word abri meant shelter and that the sign therefore indicated shelter for thirty

people. Moreover, these signs were placarded at the entrance of every cellar or basement that might be expected to provide good shelter against the explosion of bombs dropped by attacking airplanes. At first, whenever notice was received of such an attack, the alarm used to be spread by the fire departments racing through the streets. But by the time Billy reached Paris, this had given place to revolving megaphones placed in commanding positions throughout the city, through which the alarm was sounded by the scream of a siren.

This reminded Billy of the submarine attack, and he entertained his French comrades with the story while they waited in the abri for the attack to terminate.

Billy thought that if his Aunt Ella left the city and his father were sent away, he might find very useful occupation doing the same work as these French boys were doing at Red Cross Headquarters. But other things were to develop.

Simultaneously with the order that sent Dr. Ransom to Serbia for special duty came two letters from the 199th. One was from the Colonel for Dr. Ransom. The men had become friends on the voyage to France, and the Colonel felt quite at liberty to ask the Doctor's help. The other letter was from Sergeant McGiffon, and it was to Billy.

The Colonel's letter expressed the hope that Dr. Ransom could induce Red Cross Headquarters to assign him for temporary duty with the 199th.

"There are a great many things that you might do for us," he wrote. "For one thing, I am very much in need of some one who understands the ways and the language of these people. Here we are, in the Department of Charente-Inférieure, the very first American troops to be billeted here. We want to make a good showing, but we don't seem to be getting along very well. There are differences arising every day; most of them about little things, but they may grow. A very good interpreter has been assigned to us—a Frenchman. But it isn't like having one of my very own people who could get my viewpoint and give me the viewpoint of the French people."

Billy's letter from Sergeant McGiffon was a strong second to the Colonel's invitation.

"I have been promoted to be Sergeant Major of Headquarters Company, Billy. That is how I know that the Colonel is asking your father to get himself sent here to Charente-Inférieure. I hope he'll make it. If he can't do it, why can't he let you come, anyway? We're in this training area for another month, at least, and you could have a gorgeous time. We want you to come and teach us French. Nobody else ever taught us like you did."

"I wish you hadn't been ordered to Serbia, father," said Billy. "I surely would have liked going to the 199th."

"It would have been good, Billy, but we can't choose what we want to do these days."

"No, father, you can't, at least. But why can't I go to the 199th by myself? Colonel Darrell would be glad to have me come, and you know what Sergeant McGiffon would do for me."

Dr. Ransom did not reply at once. Billy took advantage of his hesitation to press his arguments.

"Aunt Ella may be leaving any day to join Uncle Henri, you know, father. And if the 199th should be moved up, I can always come back to Paris and go to work with the Scouts at Red Cross Headquarters."

"How do you know that you can, Billy?"

"I asked Major Beamer yesterday, and he said they would be glad to have me."

So it happened that when the Paris-Bordeaux express left that very evening, it had on it Scout Billy Ransom, traveling very light, all of his pos-

sessions in a musette bag which rested on his left hip and was supported by a broad strap over his right shoulder. He had been supplied by the Red Cross with an identification card and a pass in proper order, and in his pocket was a ticket to Pons, where the 199th maintained headquarters.

On French railways it is the custom to pay a small sum in advance, usually one franc, for which any seat in a first-class carriage may be reserved. Dr. Ransom had made such a reservation for Billy. Scarcely had the train started, however, when a lady looked into the carriage, from the long aisle that extends the full length of the first-class coaches, seeking a seat. Billy was surprised to see that she received no attention. The compartment was for eight persons. There were two lieutenants of the French Army, a traveling man with his sample cases, a priest, a sailor, and an old couple who were none too used to travel. Billy was the only one who even looked at the lady.

"Everything is so crowded, and this aisle space, it is filled with the smoke of tobacco," she pleaded. "If I might be permitted to place my bag on the floor and there seat myself."

Billy got to his feet without delay. Giving up one's reserved room for an all-night journey is not

exactly like giving up a seat in a street car, but he was an American and a scout!

"My seat is at your service, madame," he said.

"Ath, but you are gracious!" said the lady. "But you? It may not be that you stand?"

"Oh, I'll get along," said Billy.

"Non, non!" protested the lady. And, as Billy's seat was at the end one, they managed between them so that by using his musette bag and the lady's bag he was able to make for himself a seat on the floor. Some time during the night the other passengers left the train. Billy did not know when, but he did know that he awoke in the morning stretched full length on the comfortable cushions of the seats vacated by the officers.

"I leave you here," said the lady. "Your station is but half an hour's ride. When you come to see me—as you must—inquire for Madame Gazin."

The first men that Billy saw as the train pulled into the little town of Pons were two of his old friends of the 199th, doing guard duty at the rail-way station.

"Headquarters isn't very far," said one. "No place in this town is very far. This street is Rue Liberté. You go along it until it runs into a street running north and south, which is Rue Nationale. Go north on Rue Nationale until you see headquarters colors."

Sergeant McGiffon was just leaving headquarters as Billy came up.

"Just in time for mess, Billy," he greeted. "Come right along. Some chow we get, I tell you! What d'ye think we get to-day for first time in this country? Eggs! But the Frenchies call 'em' erfs.' A great time we had gettin' 'em! All they want us to do is to pay four times what anything is worth."

"This isn't near the front. I don't see why they should charge high prices," said Billy.

"Only because they can, Billy. And they sure are doing it."

After breakfast word came that Billy was to go in to see the Colonel, who was busy shaving.

"Morning, Billy! Did you read the letter I wrote to your father?"

"Yes, sir. Father said to tell you how very sorry he was that he couldn't come."

"I thought perhaps he had sent you, instead."

"No, sir. I came to visit Sergeant McGiffon."

"But you wouldn't mind doing a little work for us?"

"I'd be mighty glad to, Colonel."

"Well, you can understand a lot of French, can't you?"

"Yes, sir. I can carry on a conversation with most any of them."

"You know enough, then, so that if you should hear anything that would explain the little fusses the native people often have with our men, you'd be able to give me an idea of what it is all about."

"Yes, sir, I think I would."

"Well, do what you can, Billy. There's something wrong somewhere. We have an interpreter, Monsieur Marson, and I've talked to the mayor through him, but we are no nearer straight than ever. It won't do at all."

"No, sir, I'll try to find out what I can."

"Very well, Billy. Remember this is confidential."

"Yes, sir."

Until ten Billy put in the time renewing old acquaintances with the 199th. Then the mess officer picked him up and asked him to go shopping.

They visited the market and went to several of the shops.

"It's a funny thing," said Billy, "but the prices here are higher than in Paris."

"You've noticed that, have you?" said Lieutenant Grimes. "So have we!"

"You wait here," said Billy, "and let me go around a little by myself."

He was gone almost an hour.

"They're putting up a game on you," he reported.

"Everybody in the market is in it. They have tickets on all the stuff with prices marked, but the French people pay just sixty per cent of the prices marked. I watched a good many of them, and then I bought some stuff myself and just handed up sixty per cent and it was all right."

"So that's the game, is it? If that interpreter Marson was here to tell us how to say it, I think we'd have to go around and talk some plain United States in French, to these people."

"I'll talk it for you," offered Billy.

"All right," agreed the Lieutenant, "but first of all we must report back to the Colonel. He may want some different action taken. This looks pretty serious."

When they reported to the Colonel he agreed that it was pretty serious. He sent for Lieutenant Ross, the Town Major, whose business it was to act as go-between with the town officials and the army, and surprised him with Billy's revelations.

"What kind of Town Major are you, Lieutenant," asked the Colonel, "to let the army be cheated in this way?"

"It's because my French is too amateurish for the job. But now that Billy has discovered the trick for us, I suppose I can at least put a stop to it at once."

"Don't be in too big a hurry," said the Colonel.

"There is something at the bottom of this. I am willing to pay high prices for a few days longer, if it will help us find out just why the nigger was put into the woodpile."

"We can get back anything that we are overcharged whenever we care to take the matter up with the French army officials," suggested Lieutenant Ross.

"Yes, and until we have discovered what we want, we will keep this matter secret between us, except for giving it to Captain Burnett, the Division Intelligence officer. We won't even mention it to the interpreter. Meanwhile the 199th will go right on paying what those sharpers ask without a word of complaint. This is an official matter and not a subject either to be taken up with or set straight with a lot of petty shopkeepers."

"Colonel Darrel," said Billy, who was as pleased as he was excited over the discovery he had come upon so early in his stay at 199th headquarters, "I hope you'll let me help some more in this. I have an idea I think I would like to try out." He eyed the Colonel hopefully.

"You've done your share and you've done it well. I have a notion that your conversational French and your little adventure of this morning will save us quite a little money. You can safely leave it to us, now, and it will receive attention all right. Why not come along and take dinner with us?"

CHAPTER IV

ROONEY THE RASH

Billy Ransom felt sure that he would have a glorious time in Pons with the 199th. They were his friends, every one of them, from the Colonel to the humblest private. Billy was offered the privilege of the officers' mess, but he much preferred to eat with Sergeant McGiffon and the other men. They were nearer his own age and he could have better times with them. Besides, they were very anxious that he should teach them French and he was glad to do it. Teaching what he knew to some one else helped him, too.

Pons is not a very large town and had very few unoccupied buildings large enough to house even a single company. So the men of the regiment were billeted in squads and companies wherever a decent opening presented.

Headquarters company, with which Billy had thrown in his fortunes, found a billet in the out-

buildings of a farmhouse on the edge of town. The stone buildings were of massive construction, for they had been among the possessions of a French nobleman. But the neglect of a hundred years was very evident, and the base uses to which they had been put had effectually destroyed any ancient charm that might otherwise have lingered.

Under the leadership of Sergeant McGiffon the men were doing wonders in cleaning and restoring the old buildings, at least putting them into such condition that they would serve for protection against the sun, rain, and wind. Billy was given a place in a quaint little stone building that had once served as a porter's lodge, and it was here that he made the acquaintance of Sergeant Rooney.

Rooney had not crossed with the 199th, but had been found at the Rest Camp at Cherbourg, and had been ordered on to 199th headquarters.

Rooney had proved to be a very valuable addition to the company. He was of a cheerful, reckless disposition, doing things on impulse, but with a knack of doing them well. He was just a boy, only a few years older than Billy, but he had already been in action with the British. In cleaning up the old buildings and making them habitable he had been the life of the company. But perhaps his

greatest popularity was aroused by the fact that he was a singer with a very pleasing voice, and was always willing to use it.

Billy took to him at once, as did Sergeant McGiffon, and since Rooney was very anxious to learn French, Billy began to teach him some French songs.

Rooney did Billy a good turn at the very beginning of their acquaintance. It was a warm afternoon and the men had obtained permission to swim in the river that ran by the farm. It was a goodly stream, both wide and deep, and had a swift current. Billy was the first to enter the river, and foolishly decided not to wait for the others. He was a good swimmer, so without hesitation he dived in and swam with the current. It was not until he tried to get out of it that he discovered how very difficult it was. He fought it several minutes, too proud to call for help, and was almost exhausted when Rooney noticed him. The big boy was in the water in a second, swimming toward him with strong, steady, overhand strokes, and with an assurance that gave Billy added strength. When Rooney reached Billy, a very little assistance was enough.

When they reached the bank again, Rooney burst into violent, almost uncontrollable laughter.

"What's so funny?" demanded Billy, his feelings a little ruffled. "I don't see anything funny in my nearly drowning."

"Oh, it isn't that!" howled Rooney. "It isn't you at all; I'm laughing at myself."

" Why?"

"Because I'm it. Anything you like. Anything you can think up to call me. Do you know how to convert a ninety-dollar Hamilton watch into a Waterbury?"

"No! Who would try to do such a foolish thing?"

"Just me. I've done it. I had on my good wrist watch that my sister nearly went bankrupt to get for me, and you saw how I made it into a Waterbury. That's what comes of going to bed without undressing. I'm so used to wearing that watch I forgot to take it off, and now it's water-buried."

"Oh, you've spoiled your watch!" exclaimed Billy. "I'll give you mine. You really must take it."

"I guess not!"

"Yes, but you wouldn't have jumped in with that watch on if you hadn't been in such a hurry to get to me. You'll have to take mine."

"Not even the loan of it, Billy. I've just got to

have a watch, but it won't be yours. I think if I rush this right off to a repair shop they'll be able to clean up its carburetor and put in new spark plugs. What do they call a watchmaker in France?"

"They call him a horloger. I don't think I've seen a sign of one in Pons."

"Then I'll have to go to Saintes. Quite some town, Saintes is; there must be all of twenty-thousand people there."

Billy thought no more about the conversation until evening. Retreat sounded. Billy watched the companies form for retreat, heard the various company officers report to the officer of the day, saw the men stand at parade rest while retreat was sounded, and come to attention and stand at salute, facing the music, as the regimental band sounded "to the color." It was always an impressive ceremony to Billy, and usually left him in a mood of exalted patriotism.

It was evident that Sergeant McGiffon was in no such mood after the ceremony. He came into the little hut stamping his feet in marked impatience.

"What's the matter, Sarge?" asked Billy.

"Plenty!" responded the sergeant. "That idiot Rooney's trying his best to get 'busted'."

"What do you mean by 'busted'?"

"Reduced. It's the term commonly used in the army when a noncom gets set back to private."

"Why should Rooney be reduced?"

"A. W. O. L. I suppose you know that that means 'absent without leave'."

"Yes, I know that much; but why is Rooney A. W. O. L., and why would he get 'busted' for such a common failing?"

"That's it. Just because it has been so common. When the regiment first landed the men were wild to see the country. The officers thought it was natural enough, so they were pretty easy. Instead of appreciating this, the boys took advantage of it. So a week ago the Colonel cut off all passes for ten days and ordered company commanders to prefer charges in summary court against all men A. W. O. L."

"So that makes it pretty serious for Rooney?"

"It surely does. You know if a private is hauled up before the Summary Court officer, he probably gets a small stoppage of pay and so many days' confinement to the regimental area, with hard labor. That usually means K. P. You know what K. P. is, Billy?"

"Yes; it stands for 'kitchen police', which means that a man does all the dirty work of the kitchen."

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"Well, lots of fellows don't mind K. P. a bit. It has to be done every day by some one. Usually there's a regular detail on the job, so a man doing K. P. always has good company. But with a sergeant it is different. According to army regulations, a sergeant can't be put on hard labor. First of all he has to be reduced to the ranks.

"Rooney would hate that," continued McGiffon. "And that's why I'm so mad at his being A. W. O. L. I've got to report him, and what follows will be plenty."

"You're obliged to report him, are you?"

"Sure. I'm Sergeant Major and I don't play any favorites."

"No, of course you don't," said Billy. "But suppose Rooney had a good excuse?"

"That doesn't alter the fact of his being A. W. O. L. If he's got a good excuse he can go to his C. O. and have the charge removed, that's all. But I know he hasn't any. He wanted to go to Saintes and he couldn't get a pass, so he went anyway."

"I know something about his trip to Saintes," explained Billy. "It's all my fault."

"How is it your fault?"

"Why, he jumped in the river this afternoon to help me. I was in a rather bad fix, and he didn't even stop to take off his wrist watch before he came out to me. He had to get it to the watchmaker right away, and since he couldn't get a pass, he went without one."

"I suppose he thinks that is a reasonable excuse," sputtered McGiffon. "He may get by on it if he gets in before taps. But, if not, I pity him."

Billy ate his supper in a half-hearted fashion. He was very much disturbed about Rooney.

"I'm going up to the Q. M.," said Sergeant McGiffon after supper. "There's a supply truck that makes regular trips between here and Saintes, and maybe Rooney will come in on that."

"I'll go along," offered Billy. "I'm responsible for this trouble of Rooney's."

"You'll have a busy time if you make yourself responsible for all Rooney's troubles," McGiffon assured him. "If it isn't one thing, it's another."

It was growing dark when the supply truck arrived at the Q. M. depot. Rooney was not a passenger.

"He isn't with us," said the driver. "But say, I'll reckon he's the guy that got into trouble over there. It was something about a watch, and as near as I can make out, he's going to spend some time in the French calaboose for it."

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"You mean he has been arrested?"

"That's the way I heard it. There's an R. T. O. sergeant at Saintes who speaks some French, and he told me about it."

Billy looked at McGiffon in inquiring perplexity. Sergeant McGiffon threw up both hands.

"That settles Rooney!" he said despairingly.

"No, it doesn't," said Billy. "I'm sure Rooney hasn't done anything bad enough for jail. I'm going to see about it. When does this truck go back."

"Just as soon as it's loaded," said the driver.

"I'm going to Saintes on this truck," said Billy.

"Where will you stay to-night?" asked Sergeant McGiffon. "It's getting dark right now. It's eighteen kilometers to Saintes, which is mighty night to being twelve of our miles. This truck doesn't come back here, and twelve miles is some walk."

"It makes no difference," insisted Billy. "I'd go if it were twenty miles. Rooney got into this trouble from doing me a good turn. He is there among a lot of people that he can't understand. I can, and it's up to me to help him out."

"Have your own way," said the Sergeant. "But keep out of trouble yourself. Say, take this twenty-franc note — you may need it."

"No, thanks, I have money," said Billy, mounting the truck.

In spite of the jolting truck, riding through the beautiful country as evening was falling, would have made Billy very happy had he not been disturbed about Rooney. There was much to see, and he looked about him with appreciative eyes. Darkness came upon them rapidly. But as the main roads in France are almost all hard, good speed can be made even by heavy trucks, and it was not very long until they drove into Saintes.

"Where shall I let you off?" asked the driver.

"If you can go by the Hotel Messageries, let me get off there," said Billy. "I know where I want to go when I get there."

During the ride Billy had thought of the lady whom he had been able to serve on the journey from Paris. She had told him that she lived at a certain number on Rue Saint Pierre, and had given him directions for finding it from Hotel Messageries. Billy had determined to call upon her and ask for assistance for Rooney.

One thing he had not reckoned with—French towns in war time are absolutely dark. Very early in the evening the streets are quite deserted. So the boy had fairly to grope his way along. All of his

scout training had to be called into play. At last there rose before him in the darkness the house that must be the one sought.

An old-fashioned knocker on the door gave him help in announcing himself. The fierce barking of a dog inside the house sent some qualms into Billy's stomach. After a short wait, a light appeared in the hall, and as the door was cautiously opened a few inches, the head of the barking dog was thrust out as the animal made frantic efforts to get into the street. But above the dog, and holding him in restraint, Billy saw the figure of the very lady he sought.

"It is your Boy Scout friend of the train," Billy explained eagerly.

A sharp word of command quieted the dog at once, and the lady threw wide her door and invited Billy to enter, with smiles and gracious inquiries as to his welfare.

"You have come to visit us?" she inquired.

"No, madame," replied Billy, "I have a comrade in trouble, and I have come to ask your help."

It seemed that Billy had come to the right place, for the lady was the sister of the mayor of Saintes. She had lived in the city all of her life and knew all of the city officials.

"You will stay at my home to-night," she said "and to-morrow I will see my brother, the mayor, and we will see what we can do for your friend."

"Thank you very much," replied Billy, "but it is to-night that I want it done."

"Oh, I fear that is impossible," said the lady.

"To-night it is already late. The prison, it is closed.

The officials will not be there."

"But, madame, I must get him to-night," pleaded Billy. "If I do not, he will be in no end of trouble. He will be reduced to the ranks. Won't you see your brother, the mayor, to-night?"

"You Americans!" the lady exclaimed. "You never can wait! But perhaps for you my brother will act."

It was but a few steps to the mayor's house. He received his sister and Billy with evident pleasure, but when he heard their errand he became very grave.

"It is not simple, this thing," he said. "I know of the case. This young soldier is charged with theft, and we cannot allow such things. He enters one of our shops. He lays down a water-soaked watch. He looks around. He sees a watch that suits his eye. He reaches over and takes it,

offering for it no money. It is theft. We cannot let it go unpunished."

Billy was perplexed. He knew that Rooney was no thief, but the story certainly sounded bad. Then the explanation struck him.

"It is not a theft," he explained. "It is because of a custom in many parts of America. The watchmaker who is repairing a watch allows a customer to take one to use while repairs are being made. Rooney's watch was valuable and he thought your watchmaker would feel protected."

"Droll custom, indeed!" declared the mayor.

"You can prove the matter," argued Billy.
"Your sister speaks English. Let her go and ask
him questions."

"Agreed!" said the mayor.

As they approached the city prison, they saw a man in uniform coming away. They were still in the darkness, but his form was clearly shown by the lights from the open door of the entrance, and Billy recognized him as Marson, the official interpreter of the 199th.

"Wonder what he is doing here?" he said.

"I do not know," said the lady, as if the question had been addressed to her. "I do not like him. He is not good." Inside the jail, in a narrow cell, they found Rooney, harsh and defiant.

"I've come to get you out, Sarge," said Billy. "But first of all the lady is to ask you some questions, and all you have to do is to answer them honestly."

Rooney turned eagerly to the lady, and it was evident that she was at once favorably impressed. His answers to her questions bore out Billy's statement entirely.

"Very well," said the mayor, "he shall go. It is no doubt lucky that you came, for the official interpreter, who is French, of course, was here, and he did not know of such a custom. He said we should hold the young soldier in jail."

"He is not good; I tell you he is not good, that interpreter," again said the lady.

"You've got to get back by 'taps,' Sarge," said Billy. "There's a motor cycle at this station. The lady has arranged for you to take it for to-night. Take this note to the Colonel from me, and it will straighten things up some. He'll send you back to-morrow with the machine. I'm on the trail of something."

CHAPTER V

A SIMPLE FRENCH LADY

Before Billy Ransom had been in Saintes a full day he made up his mind that it was the most interesting town in France. But before another night had passed he believed it to be the most dangerous. He had come to Saintes to help Sergeant Rooney out of a French jail, that is, with help from Madame Gazin. That matter was disposed of, and the reckless Irishman was once more at large. Meanwhile Billy stayed on with the French lady.

Billy's adventures began early in the morning, as soon as he rose from the old-fashioned but comfortable bed in the front room of Madame Gazin's third floor. He stepped to his window to look out, and there, just across the narrow street, in the act of pushing open the shutters of his window, was Monsieur Marson, the French interpreter of the 199th.

Billy stepped hastily back out of range. He did not like this man. He felt suspicious of him. Why had he allowed the merchants of Pons to impose on the 199th? Billy felt that this question required an answer.

So suspicious was he of M. Marson that he stood behind his own curtains and peered across into the interpreter's room. It was an east room and the sun's rays helped Billy to see inside very clearly. So he stopped his dressing every few minutes to see what M. Marson was doing.

There was nothing suspicious in the fact that M. Marson chose to write some remarks in a long, thin notebook. But the cautious way in which he concealed this book in his coat was a different matter. There seemed to be a special pocket for it. It was an inside pocket, of course, but it was neither in the usual location in the breast, nor in the tail of the coat. Billy saw that the man raised the bottom of the coat, turned up the lining, and found his pocket inside the front seam.

"That's interesting," muttered Billy. "I'd give a nickel to see that notebook!"

There was a great deal to see that morning. Saintes is a wonderful old town, with a cathedral over a thousand years old, the ruins of a Roman arena more than two thousand years old, and some

inhabitants who seemed old enough to be identified with the town's early days.

But in all his sight-seeing Billy kept thinking of that notebook. So it was with great relief that, when examining the ancient ruins of the arena, he came upon Captain Burnett, the Division Intelligence Officer.

"Hello, Captain!" he cried. "I'm certainly glad to see you. I believe I need your help."

"I believe you do or will, Billy," replied the Captain. "The Colonel sent me the note you sent by Sergeant Rooney last night, so I had Rooney bring me over this morning. What more have you found out?"

"Nothing definite, but I've guessed a lot. I'm guessing that the interpreter, Marson, is up to no good."

"It's a good guess, Billy. I've done some inquiring at Pons. Marson knew the tradesmen were overcharging us, and he encouraged it."

"He did!" exclaimed Billy.

"Yes. He told the mayor that the rich, generous Americans expected to pay high prices and were glad to help out the poor, suffering French by doing so. The only thing was to be sure to make the high prices uniform."

- "What's the explanation?"
- "Give me your ideas, Billy. You've done some work on this; tell me what you think."
- "Well, I have thought of two things. First I thought it was money. Perhaps he was to be paid a percentage on the overcharges. But lately I have another idea."
 - "I'm waiting for it, Billy."
- "Well, last night I discovered that instead of getting Rooney out of jail, this man wanted them to keep him in. There's only one conclusion; he is trying to brew trouble between our troops and the natives here."
- "But why would a Frenchman be doing that, Billy?"
- "How long has he been a Frenchman?" asked Billy shrewdly.

Captain Burnett smiled. "Good boy, Billy. We're working on the same track. We'll keep an eye on that man."

- "I know where he is," said Billy. He told Captain Burnett about his discoveries of the early morning.
- "I'd like to get that notebook without his knowledge," said the Captain.
 - "I'll try to think up a way," Billy promised.

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"So will I," said the Captain. "Don't do anything rash; or you may spoil everything."

"Where can I find Sergeant Rooney?" asked Billy.

"In the courtyard of the Hotel Messageries. You'll be glad to know that the Colonel has overlooked his A. W. O. L. this time."

"I surely am glad," replied Billy. "Sergeant Rooney is one of my best friends. As soon as I'm through looking at these curiosities, I'll go find him."

"All right. Don't do anything to get into trouble with that man, Marson."

"I won't. Why not just arrest him and search him?"

"Too crude, Billy. We prefer not to arrest such fellows. When we know their characters they can do us no harm, and sometimes we can manage to get them to spread information that will do us a lot of good."

"I see," said Billy. "Anything that is done must be done quietly."

It was almost noon when Billy returned to Madame Gazin's house. She met him at the door with an apology.

"So sorry, my scout," she said, "but we have

had to change your room. We have moved you just across the hall. It happens that disease broke out in the house of our neighbor across the street. It is of a contagion. The house is under quarantine. Their lodger, M. Marson, who is of you an acquaintance, must move. We must give him room. Que voulez-vous! C'est la guerre."

Billy's first thought was that this might turn out to be a lucky accident. As he went up to his new room, another view struck him.

"Accident!" he thought. "This is an accident created by Captain Burnett and the secret service. Little does this good woman know for what purpose her house is being used! This man is where he can be watched now, and I am the one to watch him."

As soon as he had washed, Billy went downstairs again.

"Dinner will be at one o'clock," Madame Gazin told him.

"Won't you please excuse me from dinner?" asked Billy. "I am to meet my friend, Sergeant Rooney, and I will have lunch with him."

But Madame Gazin would hear no word of Billy going out without eating. Instead she prepared for him a very nice luncheon that he ate in her immaculate kitchen.

He was still in his room getting ready to go out when he heard M. Marson leave the room across the hall and go downstairs.

"There's my chance now!" he thought.

He darted across the hall and into the bedroom and stood for a moment making a rapid survey. Of course the coat was not there, but he could easily make up his mind where it would hang when M. Marson was asleep. There was no door except that leading into the hall. No doubt this would be securely locked at night, but Billy was prepared for this. He had provided himself with some wax, and with this he took an impression from which he might get a key made that would admit him that night. Then he would get the notebook while Marson slept.

This was the first time Billy had ever done work of this kind, and he was a trifle nervous. But after all he felt that he was doing a pretty good job. He left the room presently, for he must be very careful not to be discovered by M. Marson.

"I suppose that man Marson thinks himself pretty clever," he said to himself. "He doesn't know that the Intelligence Division of the A. E. F.

is on his trail. He doesn't know, either, that Billy Ransom is right in the same house with him, and wide awake."

Billy was beginning to feel that this Billy Ransom person was quite a detective. When he left the house he stole quietly down the back stairway and through the kitchen.

"Don't tell M. Marson that I am staying here," he instructed Madame Gazin.

"Not tell him!" exclaimed the lady. "And why would you not want the poor gentleman to know?"

This quite decided Billy. He had rather debated the advisability of asking her for a spare key to M. Marson's room instead of getting one made. But she was evidently too simple to confide in.

"You won't mind if I don't tell you," he replied.

"Just don't tell him about my being here, just to oblige me."

Madame Gazin laughed at the seriousness of her scout, but she agreed.

"She little knows what is at stake," thought Billy. "She is a simple French lady who can hardly grasp the big issues of the War. Perhaps when it is all over I can explain this thing to her."

In going near the Hotel Messageries to search for

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a locksmith, Billy met Sergeant Rooney just getting out his motor cycle.

"Just in time, Billy!" he cried. "I'm going to Bordeaux for Captain Burnett. You may ride in the side car."

Billy hesitated. It was a great temptation. "When will you get back," he asked.

"Not later than nine o'clock, maybe earlier. I ought to make it in three hours each way."

"Let me step into that shop to order a key made, and I'll go," agreed Billy.

It was the most perfect ride Billy had ever enjoyed. The French national highways were like boulevards. The quaint villages were like beautifully set pictures. There was no sign that a war was raging, except as one noticed the absence of young men, and the way in which oxen were doing the work of horses.

They reached Bordeaux shortly before four o'clock. The boys were entranced with the bustle and rush of this place, the busiest seaport in France. Under the guidance of the military police they had no trouble in finding their way, and before five o'clock they were again riding toward Saintes.

All went well on the return journey until they were within sight of the lights of Saintes. Then

from a sudden turn of the road there came bearing down upon them, at terrific speed, a glaring oneeyed monster. It was a military car with one headlight gone, and it was sweeping along at fifty miles an hour on the wrong side of the road.

Rooney tried to steer clear, but he had scant notice. The side car and the near fender of the automobile collided. There was a crash as the motor cycle and side car were thrown into the ditch, while the one-eyed monster raced on to Bordeaux as if nothing had happened.

A long time after, Billy came dimly to himself in a little farmhouse. A surgeon was bending over him. He gave the boy a jab with a hypodermic syringe and commanded, "Go to sleep, now. You're all right."

Protesting, but unable to withstand the drug, Billy obeyed. All the time that he slept he was conscious that something was wrong. He was due at some place to perform some duty. He could not recall it, but he knew that it was something important. He struggled to awaken.

At last he did awaken. Sergeant Rooney was bending over him, trying to hold him in bed.

"Lie down, Billy!" he ordered. "You'll do yourself harm fighting like that. Lie down."

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"Let me up, Sarge! I've got something awfully important I must do to-night."

"The night's gone, Billy; it's morning. Captain Burnett is coming here. Stay quiet till he comes."

Billy lay back a trifle exhausted. Very soon Captain Burnett came.

"I've made an awful mess of things, Captain," confessed Billy. "I reckon you depended on me to get that notebook last night, and here I've been lying unconscious."

"Never mind, Billy," said the Captain.

"But I may never get such a chance again! I wonder how long Marson will stay?"

"He's gone," said the Captain.

"Gone!" exclaimed Billy in dismay. He turned his face to the wall in disgust.

"Look here, Billy," said Captain Burnett, "take a look at this."

Billy turned slowly over. Before his gaze the Captain held open a long, thin notebook.

"Read it," he said.

"I can't," said Billy, "but I know what it is—it's German script."

"So it is," agreed the Captain.

"I was foolish," admitted Billy. "I supposed you needed my help, but I might have known that

you would get what you wanted whether I helped or not."

- "I'd like to accept the compliment, Billy, but the fact is I didn't do anything. There was a smarter person than either one of us at work."
 - "Smarter than you?"
- "I should say so, Billy! After all, you can claim more credit than I. It was the good turn that you did to the lady in the railroad carriage that drew her attention to our affairs. Once she spotted M. Marson, he was as good as settled."
- "You don't mean Madame Gazin!" cried Billy.
 "That simple French lady?"
- "The very same, Billy. That simple French lady is one of the most brilliant operators of the Secret Service of France."
- "Good night!" said Billy; and this time he turned over with a mind at ease to try to catch up on lost sleep.

CHAPTER VI

"THE SQUELETTE"

The day after the accident Billy slept most of the forenoon, and in the afternoon Captain Burnett took him back to Pons and placed him in the care of the regimental surgeon.

Billy insisted that he felt pretty well, but evidently Captain Burnett and Sergeant Rooney had told such tales of the way in which he had been placed *hors de combat* as to give the surgeon some alarm.

"I'm afraid to take any risks with you, Billy," he announced. "I don't know what your father would say to me if I allowed anything to go wrong with you for lack of attention."

"Father is in Serbia," said Billy.

"I know it," responded the doctor. "That's why I've got to be more careful with you than ever. Now there are one or two things about your little accident that worry me."

"One or two of them worried me, too, for a time," confessed Billy, "but I'm all right now."

"I'm not so sure, Billy. You see you suffered an undoubted concussion."

"Maybe I did," agreed Billy. "Though I didn't know it, nor anything else for quite a while."

"Exactly. And, you see, I find on using my opthalmoscope that your optic disks don't look right. I'm afraid to let you stay on here, Billy. I want to send you to some hospital where they can take an X-ray of your cranium, and where they are all equipped to do anything necessary."

"You're the doctor," said Billy slangily, "but if you leave it to me, I would rather stay here with the 199th."

"Paris is the place for you, just now, Billy."

"I'd rather not go to Paris. My aunt, Madame Deschamps, would be all upset about me, and would be writing my father and mother."

"Go to Bordeaux then. It is only a couple of hours' journey from here, and it has good hospitals."

"I don't know a single person at Bordeaux."

"That will not make any difference. I'll give you a note to Major Young, who is in charge of the

surgical service for American troops there. He'll look after you."

So that very afternoon Billy boarded the train for Bordeaux and found his way to the big building used as headquarters for American troops.

Billy inquired for Major Young. After a rather long wait word came back to him that Major Young had left the city, having been transferred to service elsewhere. So Billy kept his letter in his pocket and went to regular "sick call."

"We'll have to send you to a French hospital," said the young medical officer. "We have so many seriously wounded men that all of our beds are reserved for them and the walking cases must go to the French. When our new hospitals at Beau Desert get finished we'll have plenty of room."

This was not very good news to Billy. So long as he was with his own people he felt himself safe, but to go to a French hospital to be cared for wholly by the French was a blow to him, notwithstanding his knowledge of the language and ways of the people. He felt that he was being cut off from his own people. For the first time since leaving America, Billy Ransom felt homesick and bereft.

He was a true scout so he made no protest at the Captain's decision. But while he stood at a desig-

nated place with three French "poilus" waiting for the ambulance that was to take him to the French hospital, poor Billy really did feel dizzy, sick, and comfortless, and he was obliged to use his khaki handkerchief to mop the tears that would overflow in spite of his resistance.

"Pauvre enfant!" remarked one of the Frenchmen. "Un joli garçon. Il est très jeune."

"Not so very, either," Billy surprised them by replying in very good French. "I'm old enough to know better."

"Brave boy!" said the Frenchman, patting him affectionately on the shoulder. "We go to a beautiful place. You will love it. Here's the bus. You get in first."

The hospital was an old convent. Every one of its spacious rooms was crowded with beds, just aisle space being left between. Billy would have found it hard to understand the Frenchman's "beautiful place" had he not remembered that the soldier was just back from the desolation of war and the squalor of the trenches. Little wonder that the light hall, the white, firm beds, the sight of peaceful comrades instead of savage foes, made for him indeed a scene of paradise.

Billy himself was put to rest in one of the clean,

white beds, and because of the strain of the journey and the reaction from the excitement, he went to sleep and did not awaken until late afternoon.

When he awoke he saw sitting on the foot of his bed the long figure of a remarkably skinny man. As he was not in uniform, Billy supposed him to be a French soldier, and greeted him in French. But as soon as he found that Billy was awake, the visitor began to talk in a tongue that no Frenchman ever used.

"Say, I been waiting two hours for you to come out o' your stupor so I could get you to talk United States at me. Don't start that Frog stuff. I get it all day long, an' all I know is, 'Wee-wee'."

"Shake!" said Billy. "I'm as glad to see you as you are to see me. How do you like it here?"

"About as much as I liked sour pickles while I had the mumps. Everything sets me teeth on edge. They oughta send me back to the front. The way I feel now, I sure could bite the heads off a whole army o' them Huns."

"Just so you don't bite me," said Billy, who felt that this new friend's bite was chiefly bark. "Get pretty good grub here?"

"Oh, pretty good for such as can eat it! I bin

gassed, and everythin' in the world has that there chlorine in it now."

- "Is that why you're so thin?"
- "Partly. But I never was no heavy-weight. That ain't no reason why these here Frogs should call me names."
 - "How do you know they call you names?"
- "I can hear, I reckon. Very fust day I got here that nurse in the corner pointed me out to another one and said somethin' about 'squelette.' I want her to understand I'm no 'squelette'."
 - "What else do they call you?"
- "Oh, fântome and spectre. I don't mind that so much, but I don't like nobody calling me a 'squelette'."
- "It means 'skeleton'," explained Billy. "I think they do it because they feel sorry for you. They're sorry because you've been gassed."
- "That ain't no way to show sympathy. They make me mad. I've had three fights already, an' I'll fight the whole bunch if they push me too far."
- "I wouldn't suppose you could fight anybody," said Billy appraisingly. "You look so frail I think I could fight you myself. How did your fights come out?"

"They run away. None of 'em wouldn't stand up to me."

"That was clever of them, and perhaps kind, too," said Billy.

"Quit kiddin'," said the skeleton. "I don't expect nothing like that from you. What I want to see you about come to me soon as I heard you was American. You speak their lingo. Let's both cut away from here. This ain't no place for free-born American citizens. We can both walk. Let's go!"

"Not I," replied Billy. "I was sent here for X-ray examination, and I'm going to stay until they're through with me."

"How come anybody has sech a grudge agin a kid like you, thet they'd send you here?"

Billy laughed. "No grudge about it," he said. "Don't you know that the French have very skilful surgeons? Don't you know that they are very clever in X-ray work? Don't you know that our great Dr. Carrel is French?"

"No, I don't know nothing about none of 'em. All I know is I can't understand all this jabber, jabber around me day and night. And I'm not going to allow nobody to call me 'Squelette'. I want to get out of here."

"I wouldn't like to have you leave here just now," said Billy.

"Why wouldn't ye?" asked the thin man, amazed.

"I don't believe you'd leave a very good impression behind you," said Billy thoughtfully. "The people in this hospital judge America by us, and I'm afraid you haven't been very chummy with them."

"I sure ain't bin," said the skeleton emphatically.

"I'm going to help you get that way," said Billy.
"I mustn't get out of bed until the nurse comes, so let's play checkers."

From the nurse and the patients Billy soon learned that the thin man, whose name was Jenkins, was very heartily disliked, and that the whole ward would be glad to get rid of him. If he was an American soldier, what good would American soldiers be to France?

Billy was obliged to wait his turn for the X-ray picture. After that there was some delay about developing the plate, so that he stayed long enough to begin to feel at home, and to change the sentiment of the patients toward American soldiers. He took Jenkins with him about the ward, and by acting as interpreter, tried to bring about a better understanding.

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One evening a fresh batch of seriously wounded men came down from a camp hospital up the line and many convalescent cases were moved out to the convalescent camp, in order to provide beds. Billy went to bed very quietly that night because he knew that the man just put into bed on his left was a seriously wounded man, tired from his long journey. Jenkins, on his right, who was always inclined to be noisy, was sharply reprimanded by the *infirmière*. He went to bed very sulky, and the old patients still remaining made many uncomplimentary remarks about "le squelette".

Billy was rather slow about getting to sleep. The changes had excited him; also the disturbance about Jenkins troubled him. He lay awake a good while, and when he did drop off, it was not to his customary sound sleep.

He awoke with a feeling that there was a noise that ought to be stopped. At first he thought he was at home and that a leaky faucet in the bathroom was making the steady drip.

He recalled his location and began to look around the ward, which was illuminated only by the dim half-light customary at night.

He still heard that drip — drip — drip.

It could not be a water faucet, for the water was

at the other end of the long hall. This noise was right at hand. It was on his left. It was—

The solution came to him like a flash. He looked across to the bed on his left and with a sudden sinking feeling he saw that blood had already collected in a pool on the floor.

Without losing a second, Billy jumped out of his bed and turned back the covering of the wounded man. The mass of bloody bandages gave no definite guide to the bleeding point, but Billy knew the direction of the main artery, and made his pressure accordingly.

The patient was white to the lips and quite unconscious.

Billy needed help. He must get it, though he had no wish to excite the many wounded men who were trying to rest.

"Jenkins!" he called. "Jenkins!"

There was no response. So Billy raised his voice in the French nickname that had become so odiously familiar: "Squelette!"

Jenkins raised himself violently from his bed. "If I ketch"—— he began. But Billy cut him short.

"Get a nurse quick. This man is bleeding to death!"

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Jenkins hurried after a nurse and brought back three, one of whom was the chief nurse.

One glance at the patient was enough for this experienced woman.

"A tourniquet," she cried. "And one of you prepare the operating room for a transfusion. You, Marie, run for Dr. Ricard."

The skilful application of the tourniquet relieved Billy of his trying task. Very soon Dr. Ricard arrived, and with him another surgeon.

"I bring Major Deschamps," he explained; "he brought these patients here. He is very skilful in transfusion operations."

With a gasp of joy, Billy recognized his own Uncle Henri. The joy and surprise were mutual, but there was no time for explanations.

"This man must have blood at once, if we save him. Who will offer? It must be quick. This moment!"

Billy's countenance fell. From his heart he longed to volunteer, but a previous test of his blood had shown him to be a very poor donor.

"What's the matter?" asked Jenkins. "What are they going to do?"

"They want to save this man by giving him some

good, fresh blood. But there's no donor at hand. These patients are all too low."

"Try me," offered Jenkins. "I'm skinny, but my blood's all right. It was tested. Here's my tag what shows it."

In military hospitals it is a common practice to test the blood of patients and determine the character of the blood, so as to be ready in an emergency. When tested a small tag is given to show the classification.

Billy called Dr. Ricard's attention to Jenkins' tag. "Here's a donor," said the Doctor. "His blood's in Group 4, so he ought to do. He's been gassed, but is in better shape now."

Major Deschamps gave Jenkins a sharp glance and also looked at his tag. "He'll do," said he. "We haven't a minute to lose."

Half the ward was wide awake by this time. And men who had often derided the "Skeleton" saw him follow the nurse to the operating room to donate his own blood in the attempt to snatch their comrade away from the mysterious portal at which he lay.

"Bravo!" they cried. "Voilà un bon Américain!"

More than an hour later the little procession came

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quietly back. The patient was lifted tenderly to his freshly made bed.

"He looks better already," said Major Deschamps. "He'll do all right now. It was lucky you found him, Billy Ransom, though I don't know what on earth you're doing here. No, don't try to tell me now. Go to sleep. I'll be here early in the morning."

When the Major came in the morning he had already learned about Billy's case and had seen his X-ray plates.

"There's nothing that need keep you here," he said. "I'm going back to Chateau d'Epernay to-day, and I'm going to take you with me."

Billy thought of Jenkins and told the Major his story.

"Yes, I expect I can get him transferred to an American hospital," said Major Deschamps.

"Here that, Jenk?" called Billy to the Squelette, who was sitting up in the next bed. "You can go to an American hospital!"

"Oh, I don't know!" said Jenkins. "Mebbe I'd just as soon stay on here. A lot o' these Froggies has been around to shake hands this mornin'. Seems like they ain't so hard to get along with. I believe I'll stay on here an' learn their funny language."

CHAPTER VII

SERGEANT MCGIFFON'S BROTHER

Billy Ransom was one of the most surprised boys in France when he found his uncle, Major Deschamps. He was glad, now, that they had made him come to the Bordeaux hospital.

"It isn't necessary for you to stay here," Major Deschamps told him. "I have looked at your X-ray plates and there isn't the slightest sign of a fractured skull, which, no doubt, the 199th surgeon feared might have been the case. You may go back with me. Perhaps I shall take you all the way to my field ambulance at Chateau d'Epernay."

"I'd like to go, Uncle Henri," said Billy. "Can we stop over for a few hours at Pons? I want to let the 199th people know what has become of me, and I'm sure they would like to meet you."

"We can stop there between trains," agreed Major Deschamps.

But at Pons they gained two items of informa-

tion that changed their plans. One was in a telegram for Major Deschamps that sent him off to Chateau d'Epernay as fast as he could travel, very glad to leave Billy behind. The other was the news that the 199th was under orders to move up to the front, and was only waiting for travel orders.

Billy would have liked to go to Chateau d'Epernay, but he was more anxious to stay and see the 199th off. Indeed, he found that he would be able to travel with them as far as Tours.

Billy received a warm welcome from Sergeant Rooney, who seemed delighted to see him again. Every one was excited, even hilarious, at the prospect of moving. But Billy was surprised to find that his old friend, Sergeant McGiffon, had times when his hilarity changed to depression, and he seemed much worried.

"What's the matter, Sarge?" asked Billy. "You're the only man I've met who doesn't seem dizzy with joy at the prospect of moving up."

"That shows that you haven't met the whole bunch. If some of them are dizzy, it's because they think they can get on the 'sick book' that way."

"Not aiming to get on the sick book now, are they, Sarge? Why, they might get left behind in the hospital!" "And there are just a few who would like to be patients and stay right here out of reach of German guns."

"They might like it, Sarge, but they wouldn't let themselves do it. Not one of them."

"I wish I didn't know the contrary," said the sergeant major, "but I do. That's what's worrying me. And to think it should be my own kid brother that has the worst case of 'chilled feet' in the regiment!"

"Not Phil!" cried Billy.

"Yes, Phil. I'm so ashamed I don't know what to do. So far he has been pretty clever hiding his feelings, but I'm afraid every day he'll do something that will show him up."

"I can't believe there's anything yellow about Phil."

"Well, I'd hate to say there was, but if he isn't exactly chrome yellow, he is at least a kind of brownish ocher, and slipping fast."

"Can't we help him out?"

"I've done all I can. It makes me fair sick. Here Rooney has just got his citation, and all of us fed up about that; and then this own kid brother of mine has to go and act as if he would do anything

or have any kind of disease if it will keep him from going up with us."

"Has he told you that, or do you just suspect it?"

"He told me. He's ready to do almost anything that will get him out. I took his gun away yesterday, for fear he'd shoot off some of his fingers or toes."

"Is he as bad as that?" exclaimed Billy. "Poor chap! He must be in an awful funk. He must be as bad as Jerkson was."

"I guess he is. Jerkson's had his share and has gotten over it."

"How did he get over it?" asked Billy. "Tell me what they did to Jerkson. Perhaps it would help Phil."

"No, Jerkson's case was different. He learned his lesson before ever we sailed. Didn't you hear about it?"

"Only hints; I never got the whole story."

"Well, Jerkson never did like the idea of leaving his happy home. He said as much from the start. But he was sound in wind and limb, specially wind, and there wasn't any way out for him. When the 199th got on the list for overseas, most of us were wild with joy, but Jerkson was chock full of gloom.

Of course we didn't know the exact day of sailing. But the very first day we got the word, Jerkson reported at sick call. Something was wrong with his stomach, he said; he couldn't keep anything down."

"I'd hate that!" exclaimed Billy.

"Well, the doctor was a little suspicious, and told me to watch him. I watched, but Jerkson was too much of an artist for me. He was glad to be watched. That was exactly what he wanted. As soon as any eats got to his stomach he'd look around to make sure I was watching, and then he'd give a prize exhibition of plain and fancy throwing up."

"He must have been trained to it," said Billy.

"He was trained, all right, but he overdid it. Our captain got suspicious. He watched Jerkson himself, all unobserved, and made up his mind that the boy was playing a big game, though he surely was playing it mighty well. By that time he had been at it a week, so he really was looking pretty bad and not feeling any too well. And then came our day to sail."

"That must have been an exciting day."

"It surely was. I shall never forget it as long as I live. I was top sergeant of C Company and pretty busy, you may believe. Well, the captain came to me and says: 'Sergeant, there's one fellow in this

company who is trying to do something that'll take all the man out of him and make him bad company for himself as long as he keeps on breathing air in and out of his lungs under the delusion that he's alive. He isn't such a bad man. He is just giving way to a coward idea that has come to about half of us, only the rest of us fought it out!'

- "'You mean Jerkson, sir?' says I.
- "'Yes, I mean Jerkson,' says he. 'We've got to give him some help.'
 - "'I'm ready for orders, Captain,' said I.
- "'Well, we move out at eight-thirty to-night and entrain at ten o'clock. I am going to inform Jerkson that he is to go with us; but he's pretty stubborn and I imagine he'll try to play his game to the finish. So you will detail a squad of four men and at eight o'clock you will begin to get Jerkson started. Make him walk, if you can, but if not, carry him. He's pretty weak from starving himself, but not nearly so weak as he pretends. You and your squad will have your packs all ready and report to the officer of the day that you are sent ahead on a special detail. I rely upon you to see Jerkson safely on board the ship.'

[&]quot;The captain went over to the barracks, then to

see Jerkson. I followed along and heard their palaver.

- "'I can hardly raise my head,' says Jerkson.
- "'Too bad!' says the captain, 'because you'll find it awkward getting to the ship with your head down.'
- "'Why, I can't go!' said Jerkson. 'I'm too sick. I can't keep anything down.'
- "'You're going to be cured,' says the captain. 'What you need is a sea voyage. The doctor told me so this morning. I'm anxious to cure your stomach, Jerkson; but I'm a lot more anxious to cure your soul. You'll be a sick man all your life if I don't cure you - sick of yourself. So McGiffon and a squad are going to help you aboard the ship, and you're going to take a voyage for your health.'
 - " ' But ' ---
- "'Not a but,' said the captain, in the tone of voice that no one ever disputed. 'You're going!'"
- "And I reckon he did," said Billy, "or he wouldn't be here now."
- "I reckon he did," agreed McGiffon. "We went to his squad room quite a bit before eight o'clock. He was in bed, playing his bluff right to the finish."
 - "'Get up!' I says.
 - "'Don't you know I'm sick?' says he.

"'Don't remember that any longer,' says I.
'Curly and Jim will raise you up, and George and
Shorty will get you into your clothes.'

"'Haven't you fellows any hearts?' he says, raising up on his elbow.

"'Sure we have!' says I. 'We've got hearts, and what's more, they've got the Stars and Stripes printed on them.'

"Well, he looked at me and he looked at my squad, and he knew we would get him to that ship if we had to carry him all the way, and he reckoned that wouldn't be any too comfortable. So he began to look around for his clothes.

"After that it wasn't much trouble getting him to the ship. And, strange to tell, he wasn't seasick for a single minute. And here he is, strong and ready, and my own brother is trying to lie down in the bunk he left."

"It's too bad!" sympathized Billy. "I know how you must feel, Sarge. And then think of the way Phil must feel. I always did like Phil. Something tremendous has come over him to make him act that way."

"Thanks, Billy. I'm glad you look at it that way."

"I surely do, Sarge. And I've got an idea that

may help. Before we leave here I was going to take some of you in to Saintes. Madame Gazin asked me to bring some of you to dinner. Can you get passes for Phil and Rooney and yourself for to-morrow? Get one for Jerkson, too."

"I reckon I can, if we can get back in time for retreat. No passes after retreat."

"We can make it all right. You all meet me in Saintes at the Hotel Messageries at noon. I'm going to arrange this thing. It's going to be the best dinner you've had in France."

And it was a good dinner. From bouillon to dessert, everything was served with a daintiness and charm unequaled in the experience of these simple soldier boys. It was an occasion that they would remember as long as they remembered France. Madame Gazin intended that it should be so.

"Yes," she said smilingly, in response to Billy's compliments. "It is beautiful, my home; and these are beautiful, my things. This is my bridal home and many of these are my wedding things. See you, I have a photograph I will show you. Marie, get me the wedding photograph.

"You boys go very soon," she continued as the maid left the room. "You go to the place where

you fight for the holy cause. You are glad, is it not?"

"We surely are!" responded the two sergeants together.

"I am, too," said Jerkson. "There was a time when I pretty near disgraced the company. McGiffon knows all about it. He and the captain set me on my feet again. Now I'm anxious to get where I can prove to myself that no matter how scared I am, I'm man enough to do my part."

Neither Billy nor Phil said a word, but Phil turned very red and then very white. He felt that every one knew his guilty secret.

Then the maid returned with the photograph and Madame Gazin handed it to Jerkson.

"They're a handsome young couple, Madame," he said. "Are they friends of yours?"

Madame Gazin smiled — a smile that bore much of pain and regret.

"What think you, mon ami Billee," she asked.

Billy looked up from the picture. "It is you, Madame," he said, "when you were young."

"You are right," she said. "I was young — two years younger than now! You thought me an old woman, is it not? You are surprised to think that two years ago I looked like that."

"There is a terrible difference," said Billy candidly.

"Yes, 'terrible' is the word. In May of two years ago that photograph was taken. I was the young bride of a handsome young husband. He left me the next day for his regiment. A few post cards came, then a letter to say that they were to enter the trenches again. Nothing more except—except this!"

She held up a tiny photo of the kodak type. They pressed around to look at it. It showed only a desolate field, a forlorn-looking hedge, and in the shelter of the hedge, a lonely wooden cross.

"He lies there!" she said.

The boys were all silent until Phil, with tears in his voice, said: "I don't wonder that you are changed. It is awful!"

"Yes, it is," agreed Madame Gazin. "But it wasn't my Edouard's death that changed me. When the worst shock of my grief had passed I resolved that since my dear husband had gone, I must give myself to my country to take his place. I had one accomplishment — I could speak many languages. There was work for me. I was sent to many places."

"Captain Burnett told me," said Billy.

"When I had seen that, my little white cross became a shrine. I knew that God was good. I knew that many things are worse than death. I knew that it was better, oh, so much better, for my husband to lay down his beautiful life on the field of battle, than that he should have stayed back."

There was an impressive silence as she ended. The boys looked one at the other. No one seemed to have exactly the right word, until suddenly Phil McGiffon spoke up.

"Madame," said he, "we are not of France, but we are of a free country, and we will put our lives alongside that of your husband if they are needed. We are not all naturally daring, like Sergeant Rooney, but you and your husband remind us well that there are worse things than death."

His voice quivered as he spoke the words, but the

color in his face had changed back from white to its normal tints.

"Brave boys!" said Madame Gazin, putting her hand on Phil's shoulder and kissing him on the forehead. "You American soldiers are here with your brave hearts and strong hands because God still reigns and you fight for Him. Ah, death is a little thing to such soldiers!"

The topic changed; they talked of other things. But Billy was happy in the work accomplished.

"I believe you hit it, Billy," said Sergeant McGiffon that night. "Phil is getting all his traps together to-night."

CHAPTER VIII

40 hommes, 8 chevaux

The very first day that Billy Ransom was in France he had been obliged to translate for the men of the 199th the French inscription on the box cars in which they were to travel.

"What's it mean, Billy?" asked Corporal Riley. "It says '40 hommes, 8 chevaux.' Is it like one of the old problems: 'What will be the cost of 40 hommeys and 8 chervoos when eggs are selling fifty cents a dozen?"

"It means that the car will carry forty men or eight horses," Billy explained.

"I was afraid it meant forty men and eight horses," said Sergeant McGiffon. "I can see how we might get forty men in one of those cars by careful packing, but if we had to put in eight horses, too, I'm afraid things would be a bit crowded."

"Do we all ride in these side-door Pullmans?"

shouted Corporal Riley. "Be sure you give me a lower berth, Sarge!"

"Sure, I will, Riley! How would you like the porter to make your berth — with the head or the feet toward the engine?"

"Feet, please. And tell him to see that the sheets aren't wrinkled."

Billy had felt proud of the light-hearted manner in which they were preparing to make their hard journey. The string of box cars had been used for any and all purposes, and most of them were not even clean. A few had a layer of dirty straw on the floor, but this was worse than nothing. All the cars' prospective passengers could do was to give the dirty floors a hasty cleaning, and arrange their packs in the best manner possible.

The first time Billy's company had moved, Billy himself had gone off in a first-class carriage. If he had been allowed to choose he would have stuck by his friends and shared their box cars with them, but at that time he was traveling with his father.

Now that the 199th was about to move again, he had a better opportunity. He could travel with them at least part of the way, though he would not be allowed to go all the way to the front.

"You can go with us at least as far as Tours,"

said Sergeant McGiffon. "I don't know myself just where or how we're going. You know Head-quarters tries to make troop movements a big secret."

"But you know you are going by way of Tours?"

"Yes, I know that much, because Tours is our first long stop; and the R. T. O. man says that we'll go from Tours to Dijon, and from Dijon to Chaumont, and he doesn't think General Pershing himself knows yet where we'll go after we get to Chaumont."

"Well, if you are going to Tours I can certainly go that far, for it is right on the road to Paris. So count me in somewhere in your forty hommes."

It was not a very pleasant morning when the 199th finally left Pons. Rain had begun to fall. Rain is one of the things in which French weather has evidently had a great deal of practice, for it does it very effectively. The men marched down to the train from their billets in column of squads, and really felt forlorn to think of leaving their new friends and going into dangers that, while vague, were none the less dreadful. Some one started a noisy song, but it didn't get past the first battalion.

But when they got to the long string of cars they

received a pleasant surprise. The cars were plain box cars, just like the others in which they had ridden, but each one had been carefully swept, and several inches of clean straw laid in them as a carpet.

"That's fine work," said Billy. "When did you do it, Sarge?"

"I didn't do it," replied Sergeant McGiffon. "It was done by the citizens of Pons, as an evidence of good-will to the soldiers of America."

"And we thought they wanted to cheat us," said Billy.

"They've made that up, all right, long ago," admitted McGiffon. "They have turned out to be a mighty fine lot. Here's one of them coming all the way through the rain after us now. It's old Monsieur Perigeux, from where the Colonel was billeted. See what he wants, Billy."

Billy went forward to meet the old gentleman and conversed with him for a few moments in French. He came back to McGiffon with a smile on his face and holding something in his hand.

"What did he want?" asked McGiffon. "Did the Colonel forget to pay his board?"

"He didn't want a thing in the world except to be honest," said Billy. "He has come two miles through the rain because the Colonel had left these precious articles behind him."

He held up to the astonished McGiffon the precious articles: One piece of soap, one small box of matches, one stub of a black pencil!

"That'll do," said McGiffon. "I don't want anybody to be telling me these Frenchies are robbers. Not another word!"

Billy lost no time in finding the Colonel and delivering the articles and the message.

"I didn't suppose I was putting him to all this trouble," said the Colonel. "I left the soap and the matches because I knew they were scarce. The pencil I forgot. I ought to have known that a scrupulous Frenchman is very scrupulous indeed. Ask him to accept them with my compliments."

"He prefers not to," explained Billy. "He says that he knows you are too busy to listen now, but he is going to tell me all about everything."

"Very well, Billy. Let him tell you the story. Listen carefully, and you can come and tell me. You may as well come back and travel with us. You see they have a second-class carriage with upholstered seats for me and my staff. You can ride with us as well as not."

"Thank you very kindly, Colonel," replied

Billy, "but I'm anxious to travel with the boys, and they have plenty of room. The car we are in has only thirty-two men."

"Is that so?" asked the Colonel. "Well, go along and ride with them until you get tired of it. You can come back to my carriage at any stopping place. But say, Billy, remember that some of the enlisted men have habits that your father would feel very sad to see in you."

"Yes, sir. But the men I am with are a very fine lot."

"I'm glad to hear it, Billy. Nevertheless don't forget that men's weaknesses crop out pretty badly on a journey such as we are about to take, with forty men shut up in a small box together, to show their best and their worst."

"I'll remember, Colonel. But I think father would be willing that I should be with these men."

"Very well. You may try it. Don't forget that there's room back here whenever you want to come."

The train was just ready to start as Billy got back to his car, after parting with Monsieur Perigeux. Sergeant McGiffon was anxiously watching for him.

"Swing on here, Billy," he said. "Don't go into the parlor with your hobnails."

The men in this car had piled all their straw up in the two ends and covered it with blankets, leaving the middle of the car bare. No man was allowed to go up on the straw until he had taken off his shoes. They had the good fortune to get a well-ventilated car with sliding shutters in the ends. A few men were already lying down on their improvised beds, but most of them were in the middle of the car watching the many novel features of French life that were revealed as their train rolled along.

Traveling in box cars as our soldiers did in France, had not one comfortable feature to commend it. The novelty helped a little. The unusual sights that could be taken in by those who could crowd around the doors caused some diversion. But there was a heavy drain upon good nature. Men needed to be of good mettle to stand the ordeal cheerfully.

Billy was glad that they soon ran out of the rain into sunshine. This helped greatly, especially where the little villages were close together and there were many people to see at work. The workers were chiefly old men, women, and children, and among these the women seemed to take the lead. Seldom indeed was a horse to be seen; the plowing and the

hauling were all done by oxen with stout wooden yokes clamped on their heads.

After a ride of about four hours Sergeant McGiffon announced that they were to be sidetracked for an hour and would take this opportunity for mess. Three days' rations had been secured from the Commissary Department before starting the trip, in addition to the reserve ration which every man carried all the time and which was to be used only in emergency. Coffee had been ordered at this place and would be served by the French Red Cross.

Billy was glad to get out of the springless car, stretch his legs, and warm himself in the sunshine. His dinner was soon put away and he had half an hour for exploration, which, however, must not carry him out of the range of bugle call.

He was coming leisurely back to the car when he heard voices in angry dispute. A high board fence hid the disputants. Billy could not see them, but he heard enough to know that they had been spending their rest time in gambling and that a man who had the voice of Corporal Riley had lost all of his last month's pay.

Billy was disgusted with Riley, but at the same time he felt sorry for him; for he had heard enough to know that he had lost every cent he owned and would have no more money for at least a month. It was a fine predicament!

Riley was such a wide-awake, pleasant fellow in general that Billy was quite surprised. But he was still more surprised later on when he happened to see Riley pick up a pocketbook that was not his own, and slip it into his pocket, thinking himself unobserved. Billy knew who had dropped that pocketbook on the straw, and it was not Riley.

But he said nothing. It had been a big temptation and Riley had yielded. Perhaps when he had time to think he would come to his right mind and would make some effort at restoration. Billy would give him the chance.

Meantime the chance came to tell Corporal Riley, indirectly, something about his conduct. The trip was noisy and wearisome and long. The men, tired of looking out, settled down on their straw and told stories.

"Let's hear one from Billy," said Sergeant McGiffon. "Tell the boys about the old French gentleman, Billy."

"Yes, tell us all about him, Billy," cried several.

"All right," agreed Billy. "Some of you are going to think I'm making this up, but I'm not. It is all true. If the cap happens to fit, I can't help it."

"Well, the old gentleman came down to the station two miles through the rain and the mud, just to bring to Colonel one small cake of soap, one box of matches, and one pencil stub that had been left behind. When I took him up the Colonel told the old gentleman he should have kept the stuff. The old man shook his head and said that he dared not."

"Afraid he'd get into the hands of our M. P.'s?"

"No. He wasn't afraid of M. P.'s, either American or French."

"Why didn't he dare, then?"

"That's the story I'm going to tell you. It goes back to when Perigeux was a young man. He had been well brought up, but he got into fast company, got to gambling, lost all his money, borrowed all he could and lost that, and was in a bad fix all around."

"All you gamblers listen," said Sergeant McGiffon, who knew the failings of his men pretty well.

"Gambling wasn't the worst," continued Billy.

"Folks were pushing him for money. It was an easy matter for him to take some from his employer's funds. He borrowed a thousand francs and made an entry showing it as an advance to a branch house."

"That's the regular order of things," said McGiffon. "Gamble — broke — debt — steal."

"He told me that he really did not mean to steal, and he expected to be able to pay the money back and close it up, but unfortunately that very night he won five hundred francs. It was unfortunate, because it gave him the idea that he could do the same thing the next night, and so get clear of his debt."

"I'll say he lost it all."

"He did, and even added some more debt. But winning that five hundred francs so took hold of his imagination that he kept feeling sure that with one more trial he could win everything back."

"How long before the police got him?"

"Never. That is the best part of this story. One day a young friend in the same office came to him with a white, scared face and whispered, 'You must get away, Perigeux. You are discovered.'" He began to gather his stuff together, when there came over him a great shame of his cowardice. 'What's the use of running?' he thought. 'It will only lead me still lower.' So he was man enough to go to his employer and tell him everything. The employer was a good man, so uncommonly good that he cleared up the whole thing on the promise of Perigeux that he would never again yield to the slightest temptation to gamble or steal. So the young man

began again and has reached the honor of being the most highly respected citizen of Pons."

"That's a happy ending," said McGiffon, "but it doesn't often end that way. More often gambling goes on to stealing and the stealer goes on to the penitentiary."

"You fellows make me tired with your talk about the penitentiary!" objected Corporal Riley.

"I should think we would," retorted McGiffon.
"I've been hearing about you, Riley. If you don't get any worse than tired, you'll get through."

Riley turned off, sulky, and Billy feared that McGiffon's words had spoiled his story. So he took particular pains to seek out Riley at the next stop, where supper rations were served, and eat supper with him in as friendly a way as possible.

Billy had learned that friendly acts always paid big returns, and so it happened this time. Night came shortly after they again entrained. It was pitch dark in the car, but a couple of flash lights helped the boys to pick out places to lie down. Billy was far from comfortable. He just could not find a good place for his head.

Suddenly he heard Riley at his side.

"Never saw my air pillow, did you, Billy? Well,

here it is, all blown up and ready to use. Put your head down on it."

"But you need it yourself," said Billy.

"No, I don't. I've got my coat rolled up. I want you to have this pillow, Billy, to show you that I appreciate something you have done for me to-day. I was going just like that Frenchman, Billy. But I'm through. And this afternoon I picked up a pocketbook with money in it. At first I thought I'd keep it. Then I heard your story and I decided to give it up as soon as the loser hollered about it. But nobody has said a word and it puts me in a bad light if I keep it, because McGiffon will want to know why I held it. I'm going to be square, so you take it and see if you can find the owner. Will you, Billy?"

"Sure I will, Riley," said Billy. "I saw you pick this up, but I wanted you to square it up yourself, just as you're doing. Thank you for finding it. The pocketbook is mine."

CHAPTER IX

BILLY ENTERTAINS FRIENDS AT TOURS

"Detrain at Tours. Await further orders from Chaumont."

This was the telegram received by Colonel Darrell and by him passed on to Sergeant Major McGiffon with the order that all concerned be notified.

"I hope you can stay in Tours several days," said Billy Ransom. "It's a wonderful city, one of the most wonderful in France. Father took me there from Paris one day, and showed me a lot of things."

"We're not over here for sight-seeing, Billy, but we don't mind taking a look at things as we go. If we stop at this place a day or two, we'll let you take us around."

"I surely would like to show you that grand old cathedral and I know you would always be glad to have seen the fine hôtel de ville."

"No good talking hotels to us, Billy," said Ser-

geant Rooney. "We're doughboys. We do well if we get a good barn roof over us."

"This isn't the kind of hotel you think it is, Sarge," said Billy; "the French use the name hôtel de ville for their city hall. The one at Tours is not very old, but it's a beauty."

"All right, Billy. You fix it with G. H. Q. that we stay in Tours long enough, and we promise to go with you to see your cathedral and your city hall, and then maybe you'll take us to a picture show or something we'll really enjoy."

"Now you're just talking to hear yourself, Rooney," protested Billy. "You'll like the real things of that beautiful old city a lot more than any picture show, and you'll remember them longer. I will take you to a picture show, though, if you can get leave."

"'Tis done, Billy. I want seats in the balcony with the real French people."

"You'll get seats where they don't cost too much, if I pay for them," Billy assured him.

It was no unwelcome order that bade them detrain from that line of French "parlor cars", as the boys called them. The men stretched their stiff limbs, stamped their cramped feet, and rubbed the aching bony prominences which had come into

closest association with the hard boards during the long night.

The march through the streets of Tours was the most interesting that the men of the 199th had yet taken. Tours has a population of about seventy-five thousand. It is of even greater interest than its size would indicate, partly because its nearness to Paris gives it many of the airs of that great city, and partly because of its antiquity and romance.

Billy marched along in the line of file closers, just behind Sergeant McGiffon. The men of the company were so used to him that he drew no attention from them, but he could hear the French onlookers exclaiming about "le petit éclaireur."

Suddenly he heard a boy's voice shouting in French that was supposed to be English.

"Ho, scout! You come! Par ici! Vite!"

Looking around quickly, Billy saw in front of the Hotel Bordeaux a group of boys in Boy Scout uniforms.

"I'm going to leave you for a few minutes, Sarge," he called to McGiffon. "There's a bunch of scouts over here and one of them has called me. I'll find you when you are settled."

He left the column and darted over toward the hotel.

"You called me?" he asked. "Which one of you speaks English?"

"Onglees, me!" the tallest scout replied. "I have Onglees some. There is by this hotel un officer American who demands for messenger Boy Scout having Onglees. Me, I have too few."

"All right; lead me to him," said Billy.

In the hotel they found the number of the officer's room. All went upstairs and stood grouped around the door as the tall scout knocked.

"Hullo, hullo!" said a jovial voice, as the door was opened by a good-looking young man in the uniform of a captain. "What's all this about? I'm a scoutmaster at home, but I came over here for other duties."

"Sir," said the French boy, "it is of your demand to see one scout having of the Onglees. Voilà!" He waved his hand dramatically in Billy's direction and stepped to the rear.

"You speak English, do you?" asked the officer.
"Do you understand it pretty well?"

"Yes, sir," said Billy. "I've been speaking it for about fifteen years."

"You are an American," said the officer. "Now do you speak French as well as English?"

"Not quite," admitted Billy honestly.

"Take leave of your friends and come in here."

"You can do me a fine good turn if you will," said Billy to the scout. "Some of my army friends are quartered in the barracks near the hôtel de ville. I promised to take them out this afternoon to see the hôtel de ville, and the cathedral and a picture show. But if this officer wants me, I must stay here. Will you look after my soldiers for me?"

"French scouts cannot do too much for American soldiers," replied Jean Fouré, the tall scout in French. "We will all go and help your friends have a good time. It will be fun."

Billy wrote a note of explanation to Sergeant McGiffon and gave it to Jean. Then he went into the room.

"Here he is, Colonel," said the officer. "He is an American Boy Scout. I don't know how he comes to be here, but he seems to be exactly what we want."

The American addressed as Colonel was sitting before a small table which was covered with maps and military papers. He looked sharply at Billy and smiled.

"You are the boy I saw at Pons with the 199th, are you not?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Billy standing at attention.

"And your name?"

"William Ransom, sir, but every one calls me Billy."

"That settles it. Billy Ransom is just the boy for us. I have heard how you helped at Pons. We came here to do some rather important business and brought a good interpreter with us, but this morning he was taken violently ill. Captain Ferguson will take you to luncheon with him and then you will go with him and do what he wants you to do this afternoon. You will stay with Captain Ferguson all the time and do exactly as he directs."

"Yes, sir." Billy saluted and turned to the door, where Captain Ferguson was waiting.

The Hotel Bordeaux supplied an excellent luncheon, and then Billy learned from the Captain where he was to go. He obtained directions at the hotel office.

Billy had no difficulty in finding his way about the city, which is laid out on a more generous plan than the average French city of its size. By three o'clock they had visited several branches of the French military service, and had practically completed their mission.

"Now, Billy, we don't have a thing to do until five o'clock, when we must be back at the hotel for the meeting we have arranged. Several of the French officers talk English fairly well, and Colonel Graves talks pretty good French, but you must be there in case of complications. You may have to act as official interpreter. Now where shall we go until five o'clock?"

"I think you would enjoy seeing the cathedral," said Billy.

"Very well, let's go."

The cathedral is one of very special interest, dating back many hundreds of years, but as services were being conducted, they slipped quietly through a side door to the great stone stairway leading to the tower.

They climbed hundreds of steps, going round and round that winding stairway until there was born in their minds a great respect for the ingenuity and perseverance of its builders. But at last they reached the top and found there a platform from which they could look not only at the beautiful city of Tours, but also upon many miles of peaceful country around it.

There is no fairer part of France than the country lying around the historic city of Tours, and no more beautiful country in the world than the wonderful valley of the Loire. Captain Ferguson, fortunately,

had his field glasses with him, and through them they were able to see clearly some of the romantic châteaux that have stood for generations in that district and fortunately have escaped the hazards of war.

As Billy was taking one last lingering look through the Captain's field glasses, he happened to focus them upon the street beneath. There he saw Sergeants McGiffon and Rooney, accompanied by Jean Fouré, just going away. Evidently they would be gone before he could reach the street.

Billy was greatly disappointed for a moment, but his disappointment was swept away by another emotion, for, into the range of his glass, there suddenly came a figure that he felt sure he recognized to be that of Monsieur Marson, formerly the interpreter for the 199th.

Through the cleverness of Madame Gazin, of Saintes, this man had been found guilty of treason, and Billy supposed him to be safely in prison. What was he doing in Tours?

He disappeared in an instant, leaving Billy on the top of the high tower, ardently longing for the wings of a bird or a bird-man, that he might make a safe, instantaneous descent; although Billy Ransom, being only a boy, might have been hard put to it to know just what to do with Marson if he had met him face to face on the street.

Billy did not mention the matter to Captain Ferguson. It was too uncertain. Together they went back to the Hotel Bordeaux, and within half an hour after their arrival came several officers of the French Army, who talked for a long time with the American officers, Billy translating for them occasionally. The most that he gathered from this meeting was that it was a prelude to a still more important conference that would occur the next morning.

"Thank you greatly for your services, Billy Ransom," said the Colonel as the meeting ended. have another interpreter engaged for the meeting to-morrow, but I don't know how we could have managed without you to-day."

Billy went away well content. He wondered if it were too late to overtake his friends who had gone with Jean to the picture show.

He decided that it was worth trying for, anyway. There were only two picture houses operating in Tours at that time, so he could not go far wrong. Opposite the door of the first there was a poster with the heading "La Revanche." But the face that grinned out upon him from below the French title

was that of an American film hero, and Billy knew that the homesick American boys certainly had made this their choice.

The house was filled, and as the picture was already showing, it was darkened. Standing in the rear, Billy listened patiently and was soon rewarded by hearing Rooney's laugh, as the hero, his teeth all showing in a familiar grin, jumped lightly from the top of a train into a passing automobile.

Having located the laugh, the next thing was to reach his friends, no easy matter in that dark and crowded house. Billy was feeling his way carefully along the rows of seats when he stopped short. He heard some one mention the 199th.

It was not one of his companions, for the conversation was in French. Who could it be? He listened carefully.

"You will have to lie low until they move on. It is very unfortunate that they came. However, I have learned that none of them will be at to-morrow's conference, so"—

"You think because it is dark that people cannot hear."

That was enough. Billy was convinced that an interpreter was within arm's length of him. Also

the mention of the conference told him everything.

He withdrew quietly from the theater, and hurried back to the Hotel Bordeaux.

The Colonel had gone to bed, but Captain Ferguson took Billy in and had him tell the whole story.

"And you think that this Marson and his accomplices managed in some way to make our interpreter ill so that he might get his place?"

"Yes, sir, I'm sure of it."

"But he comes with high recommendations from Paris authorities."

"That makes no difference. Send a telegram to Saintes, asking Madame Gazin to come here on the night train. Then invite Colonel Darrell, of the 199th, to the meeting. Let them be concealed until Marson is well settled. They will identify him and prove him a spy."

"This is very important, Billy, very important. No one must know of that conference to-morrow. We do not even wish it to be known that such a conference is held. You will sleep right here to-night, my boy. We shall need you to-morrow."

Billy was too tired to stay awake, although greatly excited. He slept so late that he had barely

time to gulp down his breakfast before the important meeting.

Just before the conference met he was led into a little alcove, where he found Colonel Darrel and Madame Gazin.

Then the officers gathered, and in a few seconds in walked Captain Ferguson, accompanied by M. Marson, who took his place at a table.

"Is every one present vouched for?" asked the general who was presiding. One after another those present stood up and presented their credentials.

"And the interpreter?" asked the presiding officer.

"I am vouched for by M. Justin Marcel, banker, of Paris," he said, presenting a letter.

At this moment Colonel Darrell and Madame Gazin stepped from their alcove.

M. Marson, the interpreter, saw them, glanced wildly around the room, and attempted a rush for the window. But Captain Ferguson was too quick for him. He was led from the room by two soldiers.

"Scout William Ransom will stay and act as interpreter, if it is permitted," said the Colonel.

So Billy helped at a most important conference

and, when all was over, the general who had presided shook him by the hand and told him that he had done a good service, and noted his name and address that he might be called upon if needed at a later time.

"I hated to leave the boys in the lurch yesterday," said Billy to Captain Ferguson. "I had promised to entertain them."

"Never mind, Billy," Captain Ferguson consoled him. "I think you made quite a record as an entertainer, anyway."

CHAPTER X

KEEP THE HOME FIRES BURNING

Scout Billy Ransom was in a hurry. The general who had come to Tours to preside at the conference of French and American officers had sent for him. What did he want?

"I want you to help me, Billy Ransom. Colonel Darrell has told me that you are thoroughly American in your quick thinking. I need some information that I can get through official channels in a month, but I believe you can bring me in a couple of days."

"I'm all ready," said Billy.

"My sister's boy, James Banks, was so anxious to go to war that he ran away from home two years ago and managed to enlist in the French Army. A week ago Captain Bell saw him passing through Paris, one of a trainload of wounded French soldiers. The train was just pulling out and the

Captain could only learn that the wounded men were being evacuated to a base hospital at Nantes."

"Yes, sir. You want me to go to Nantes and find if James Banks is at the base hospital?"

"Well, it won't be quite so easy as all that. Nantes is a big city, more than twice as large as this. It covers a great deal of ground and there are many hospitals. You must remember that to meet the great needs of this war all manner of schools and convents and private homes have been turned into military hospitals."

"Yes, sir. I see that it may not be so easy. Perhaps I shan't be able to find him in one day. But then I have plenty of time. I will start for Nantes at once if you will get me the necessary papers. How long a trip is it?"

"About six hours. I will get all the papers ready for you at once. And I think that you will find him if he is using his own name, because the very fact that he is an American soldier in the French Army will serve to make him conspicuous."

"But it is not uncommon for American soldiers to be in French hospitals," said Billy, remembering his own experiences at Bordeaux.

"No, but it is uncommon to find wounded French soldiers who are Americans. That is what you must

look for, Billy; a French soldier who is an American."

"I'll find him," promised Billy confidently. "I will get ready to go at once. What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him that there is a place for him in the U. S. Army, on my staff."

"Yes, sir. I am awfully glad to take that message, General."

The train to Nantes was badly crowded. Firstclass passenger coaches on French express trains have a long corridor running along the side of the coach for its full length, and from this aisle, compartments open off, each of which will seat ten or twelve passengers. The best that Billy could do was to get a chance to stand in the corridor.

He got tired of standing long before Nantes was reached. He had no baggage except the bag in which he carried a change of underwear and a few odds and ends of clothing and equipment. The floor of the corridor was very dirty, but he put his bag down, seated himself upon it, leaning back against the frame of the compartment behind him, and finally went to sleep.

You may imagine that Billy was very tired, for he did not waken until the train was pulling into Nantes and passengers began to crowd out of their

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compartments into the long corridor, anxious to be first to leave the train, just as railway passengers are in America.

"It is my Boy Scout!" said a lady, who came from one of the compartments. "Wake up, Billy Ransom!"

"Madame Gazin!" cried Billy. "I thought that you were on your way home."

"So I am, going by way of Nantes because the service is better. Besides, I have some business here. But what do you do here?"

Billy told her his errand.

"It will not be hard if he goes by his English name," said Madame Gazin. "But that is not likely. You say his name is James Banks. What kind of French name would that make?"

"It would be Jacques for James, and for Banks he might keep the name unchanged, or change it into any of half a dozen names that mean the same thing."

"So it won't be easy, mon petit scout. It is too late to do anything to-day. I have friends in the hospitals. Come with me and let us try to arrange something for to-morrow."

The train came to a standstill and Billy followed

Madame Gazin out to the platform and gave up his ticket at the gate, as is the French custom.

"No one is expecting me," said Madame Gazin.
"We shall travel by tram, or, as you say in America, by street car."

Billy noticed by the great crowds of people that Nantes was a city of considerable importance.

"Besides the normal population," Madame Gazin told him, "there are nearly forty thousand refugees from Belgium here now. Large ships come up the Loire as far as Nantes, turning the city into a bustling seaport."

They left the tramcar at the Place de Commerce, and a few minutes' walk brought them to a building that had formerly been a women's college.

"The nursing sisters of the French Red Cross have their headquarters here," said Madame Gazin. "We can find from them what you must do."

When they entered, Billy discovered that they were in a very busy place. However, Madame Gazin secured attention without delay.

"It is not an easy question you ask," said the chief. "There are at least twenty-five thousand wounded soldiers in Nantes at present, and they are distributed in many hospitals, at least, thirty. If your task obliged you to see every patient, you might

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spend several days in a single one of the larger hospitals. But it helps a little to know that this man arrived here within the week. That means that unless he had tuberculosis or was insane, he went to Martres. If he was a surgical case, he went to Doulon."

"He was with a lot of surgical cases," said Billy, "for he was with men who wore bandages."

"Then Doulon will be the first place to try."

"Why can't I go there this evening?" asked Billy.

"It is four miles away, and there are eight hospitals there. Nurses do not like to have patients disturbed by visitors after they are settled for the night."

"Of course not," Billy agreed. "I shall go to Doulon early in the morning. To-night I shall go to a hotel."

"We will give you a bed," said the chief. "And in the morning we will do all that we can to help."

In the office that evening Billy was glad to find an American girl. She was a professional singer who had been sent to Nantes by the Y. M. C. A. to entertain American soldiers in the hospitals.

"But there are very few American wounded in Nantes yet," she said. "I fear that there will be

many more later on, but just now I can scarcely find any to listen to me. So I sing for the French instead."

Billy found how much Madame Gazin's interest had helped him, the next morning when, after giving him a good breakfast, the chief placed at his service a motor cycle with a side car and a driver.

"This is certainly fine of you," said Billy. "I feel sure that with this help I shall find my man to-day."

"Vive l'Amérique et vive les Américains," replied the chief, with a smile. "You are saving our country."

Billy did not think it likely that James Banks was a victim of either tuberculosis or insanity, so he spent no time in visiting the special hospitals for men so afflicted.

He asked the driver to take him right out to the largest hospital in Doulon, resolved that he would go through them one by one, if need be, and not give up until he had either found James Banks, or visited every ward in every hospital hunting for him.

Doulon is really a town in its own right, though it has become a suburb of Nantes by reason of the larger city's growth. However, it has well-built

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houses and shops, and its streets, though narrow, are well kept. The hospital to which the driver first took Billy was a fine, large building standing in spacious grounds with several smaller buildings annexed.

Billy went straight to business. One of his good points was the ease with which he always gained a hearing. He had been trained by his father to approach his elders with respect and courtesy but to go straight to the point without fear, remembering always that the greater the person he was to meet, the more would be appreciated a natural, direct manner. So he always stated his wishes in a boyish, straightforward way that was very pleasing.

"We shall look on our books for James Banks," said the registrar. "It is an unusual name for the French Army, so it should be easly found."

Alas, there was no record of James nor any other Banks! Neither could any record be found of Bancs or Banques which would be more nearly the French spelling.

"May I go through your wards and see what I can find?" asked Billy.

"Yes, if you think that will help."

Billy really had not deceived himself with the idea that a light job lay before him. He knew that

searching those wards for James or Jacques Banks meant a busy time. But it was not until he stood at the entrance of the first surgical ward and looked down the long, long room, his eye resting first on the many beds on the one side and then on the long line opposite, every one containing a wounded French soldier who might be an American named James Banks, that the real size of his task came to him.

The nurse and the ward master were the especial objects of his attention. There was no good talking to the surgeons; they hardly ever knew the names of the patients.

"Have you had many new patients in the last week?" he asked.

"Not many. The patients in this ward have severe wounds. We do not change so often as some."

"I am searching for a wounded French soldier who is an American. His name is Banks. He has come within a week."

"We have no such man. Few patients have been received here within a week. Go to the Belpre Annex."

From ward to ward Billy went, always polite and always pleasant, asking similar questions and get-

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ting similar answers, except that but seldom did his informants agree as to the place where the newest patients were likely to be. At the Belpre Annex they thought the St. Martin Cottage might be the place, and the nurses at the St. Martin Cottage were sure it must be the Grand Hospital he was seeking. So he was sent from one place to another without gaining much but negative replies.

The driver of the motor cycle, a very obliging young man, helped as much as possible, but with the same result. There was one place to which every one agreed that many new patients had come lately. This was Provisional Hospital No. 5, strictly an emergency hospital, consisting of a series of long wooden huts, and containing nearly a thousand patients in all.

Billy finally felt sure that his man must be in No. 5. The ward masters and nurses agreed that most of their patients were newcomers. They looked over the registration cards without finding any name resembling Banks, but they admitted that the men were so new that they could say little about them from personal knowledge.

The huts were crowded and rather dirty and noisy. They had less to recommend them than any hospital ward that Billy had seen. But he spent

time enough in them to go through each section and make repeated inquiries for James Banks. He found three Englishmen and two Americans, but none of them acknowledged the name.

At last Billy was ready to leave Doulon and its hospitals in despair. Yet he hated to give up, for certainly this was the logical place for his man.

"I just can't give up!" he said to his driver.

"I've just thought of something I'd like to try. It
will do some good, anyway. Can the side car carry
two persons? I want to go back and get Miss
Friend, the singer, to come out here. She can do
more on this case than I can."

"You and she are both small," said the driver, "and I think the car will carry both of you."

Miss Friend was easily found and very willing to come. She had come to France for just such work as this.

"Start in this ward," said Billy, leading the way to the ward where he had found the Englishmen and the two Americans.

The minute the singer began, the ward became silent. Very soon Billy noticed a crowd gathering around the doorway, consisting of *infirmiers*, orderlies, and patients from other wards. He stepped

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quietly to the door and beckoned the waiting ones outside.

"Miss Friend is singing for soldiers of the French Army who are Americans," he said. "Who among you have Americans in your wards?"

From the responses Billy made his selection for the next concert. To his great disappointment, however, he found the ward to be one already visited.

He looked eagerly at the man who claimed to be an American, but knew at a glance that he was too old a man to be the one he sought. Still it was all right. At least he would get much pleasure from Miss Friend's singing. She was singing "The Long, Long Trail," and the melody and pathos that she put into it made Billy quite homesick. The French soldiers, though they could not understand the words, followed every inflection of her voice. And there was one young fellow, just three beds from Billy's position, whose face twitched as if he knew it all. Billy suspected that he not only understood the words, but that they were affecting him deeply.

Billy watched this boy closely. He watched him through "Keep the Home Fires Burning", and he saw tears gather in the tired, sick eyes. And

when the singer turned to "Over There", the man cautiously raised the arm that was not bandaged and furtively wiped away the tears with the back of his hand.

Billy's mind was made up.

"Star-Spangled Banner!" he whispered to Miss Friend, approaching the sick man's cot.

At the very first line the young soldier raised himself in bed in an attempt at "attention."

"Sing!" shouted Billy to him. "It'll do you good."

Scarcely was the anthem ended before Billy was at the soldier's side. He saw the name at the head of the bed — Jacques Barbier — but that did not deter him. The name might be French, but not the man.

"Now tell me, James Banks," he asked, "why did you let me go right by you this morning."

"Ashamed!" whispered the boy. "I have been hiding under my mother's name — Barber. I came to France to do glorious things, and I'm nothing but a wounded poilu. I knew some one would be looking for me as soon as Captain Bell told that he had seen me, and I decided I wouldn't be found until I had done something. But I couldn't stand those

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songs. They made me homesick for my own people and my own country."

"I'm awfully glad," said Billy. "And I'm sure your country wants you now as badly as you want her. There's nothing like the good old U. S. A., is there? I'm mighty glad Miss Friend came to sing for you."

"It's the finest music I ever heard!" exclaimed James Banks.

"You'll be able to hear that kind of music every day now," said Billy. "Maybe Miss Friend will sing some more for you right now while she is waiting for me. I have to run off for a little while and see if I can telephone to Tours." And Billy sought out the singer, who was making as many friends with her pleasing manner as with her rousing songs.

CHAPTER XI

BILLY RESCUES A GENERAL

Although Scout Billy Ransom had had many adventures, such as being in a submarine attack, being knocked senseless by a military car, unearthing a German spy, and traveling alone on French railway trains and through large French cities, he never had really considered that he had been in a place of danger until he went to "the front" with General L.

They started from Nantes. The general had come there in his touring car, after Billy had found his nephew for him. On the way back he expected to visit and inspect several posts where American troops were stationed. Since Billy was now due in Paris to live with Aunt Ella again, and the General's ultimate objective was Paris, he invited Billy to travel with him. You fellows can guess if Billy accepted.

A general's car may be any kind of vehicle that

a general can ride in, but usually it is a very good car. This one was. When a brigadier general is the occupant, the car shows one star, signifying his rank; when a major general, it shows two. This car carried one star.

Billy was very proud and happy riding along the splendid French roads through the beautiful country in such glorious weather. It was the most delightful part of his experiences in France. He rode in the front seat with Dick Holcomb, the chauffeur, and the General rode in the rear seat, alone with his thoughts and his dignity.

They made their first stop at Angers—pronounced Anzhay—in less than two hours. It is a brisk business city. Billy had a couple of hours in which to explore it and did a lot in the time. Then the little party went on to LeMans, where they stayed all night. They did not start very early, but reached Chartres before evening and spent not only the night but all of the next day there. This was seeing France in splendid style. Their next stop was at Mantes, which is a little west and a little north of Paris.

"I suppose we'll shoot right down to Paris from here," surmised Dick. "That's what the General did the last time we came this way."

But just as they were about to start for Paris next morning, the General received word that decided him to go on up to Beaumont.

"You need not go with us, Billy," he said. "I can easily get a ride for you on to Paris from here."

"But I'd hate awfully to miss it, sir," said Billy.

"Well, if you want to, I guess it is safe enough."

So Billy continued the trip.

They had nowhere near reached Beaumont, however, before they were met by a "runner" who had come out from that town on a motor cycle, with an important message. He had come to meet the General and thus save time and distance for him.

"You are wanted at Château-Thierry as soon as you can get there, sir," he informed the General. "You need not go on to Beaumont. This road that turns east will take you nearly direct, and cut the mileage considerably."

Billy saw the General cast a doubtful look in his direction.

"Please don't bother about me, sir," he said.

"Let me stay; there will be lots of good safe places to leave me before you get into the danger zone."

"Well, I guess you are just as safe traveling with us as staying here," said the General. "We shall be passing cars going to Paris when we get a

little farther along, and I shall get one of them to take you in."

But there was a lot of artillery activity in that territory that day, and cars going to Paris seemed to shun the road.

They had been hearing the dull boom of big guns all day. Now it increased in volume and sharpened in tone. The roads began to show signs of shell explosions too recent for repair. And all of a sudden Billy heard the faint whir of an airplane and, not so very high above them, he could see in the sky a swiftly moving object far too large for any bird.

Billy was so frightened that he had to use great effort to control his voice enough to tell Dick what he had seen.

"Yes, I know," said Dick. "It is probably a German bomber. Don't pay any attention to it, and very likely it won't trouble us. Usually they have more important business than droppin' their eggs on just a lone auto. I have had any number pay me more attention than we are getting from that chap."

Billy felt a little better at this assurance, and tried to imitate the unconscious attitude of Dick and the General. When he did look up, though, the plane was so low that he could easily see the cross that was misused by the Germans as a device for marking their military craft.

Just ahead of them was a bridge that spanned a stream of considerable size. It had evidently been damaged by shell fire or bombs. The iron railing was twisted so that it lay across the bridge and quite barred their passage.

"I guess I can lift that off," said Dick. He stopped the car and ran toward the bridge. The plane above them seemed to come lower down. Even the General seemed worried.

"You stay here, Billy," said he. "I'm going down to help him clear that wreckage. We must move quick. There's no telling when that fellow may let fly at us."

The General ran to the bridge and Billy watched the two men tugging and pulling violently to clear the obstacle from the road. He dared not look up, but he knew from the sound of the plane that it must be very close. He kept his eyes glued on his two companions working at the bridge for very life, and his breath came more freely as he saw them, at last, raise the barrier and push it to one side.

But his congratulations were premature. He saw no bomb drop, though he still heard the plane. It seemed farther away now. And then suddenly came a terrific explosion, as if the whole world rose up in a confused whirl just ahead of him. He closed his eyes as he felt falling fragments striking him sharply, and pieces of the shattered wind shield cutting his hands and face.

He opened his eyes in a moment. Through a cloud of dust he could dimly see the General staggering to his feet and groping for something to hold on to. Billy thought no more of his own cuts and bruises. He jumped out of the car and picked his way along the broken road to the injured officer's support.

"I can't see!" groaned the General. "Did he get the car?"

"No," Billy assured him. "It seems all right except for the wind shield and the top. Let me help you back."

Once the General was seated, Billy ran back to look for Dick. His search was short. The poor boy lay dead at the very entrance to the bridge he had just cleared. The bridge still stood, seemingly little injured. Most of the damage had been borne by the road between the bridge and the car, though Billy could see that it was still possible to drive cautiously around it.

"Poor Dick!" cried Billy, as he knelt beside

him, the tears streaming down his face. He had seen death before, but not the sudden death of battle. It shocked and awed him, but it also strengthened his purpose.

"I must get that car along," he said. "The General needs help. The bomber may come back to see what has happened here."

Tenderly he removed Dick's "tin hat" and put it upon his own head. He also took his gas mask and his overcoat. In his pocket he found an old watch, a pocketbook, and some letters, which he transferred to his own pocket. He would send them home some day. Then he straightened out the body by the side of the road, tenderly kissed his dead comrade upon the forehead, and went back to the car.

The General had collapsed in the back of the car and seemed to be unconscious, but as Billy tried to examine him, he revived.

"I must get to Château-Thierry, Billy," he said.

"I'm beginning to be able to see a little now. But leave me just as I am, and tell Dick to get along to Château-Thierry as quickly as possible."

"Yes, sir," answered Billy. "Let me throw this coat over you. We can get over the bridge all right now."

Billy had driven his father's car at home over all kinds of country roads, but never had he essayed such a delicate task as that involved in crossing the stretch of shell-torn earth that lay between him and the bridge. There was one place where the left wheels seemed to turn in space and the car tipped so that it was hard to stay at the driver's wheel. At another place it dropped in such a sickening way that it seemed as if all progress must stop. Gravel and stones rolled away down the embankment as if inviting the car to follow. But it got across at last, crossed the bridge, and started along the level country road.

Billy was thankful that he still had daylight and a level road ahead of him. It was no time to be circumspect. Excepting for slacking down for corners and rough places, he ran at top speed. He heard no more of the German plane. Either the bomber had been scared away or had thought the damage enough.

Half an hour of this traveling forced Billy to slow down. He had reached rough roads, roads in which shell holes were many, roads that had been cut up by the passage of artillery and heavy trucks. It would not do to race along these, even if it were possible.

"Are you comfortable, sir?" he asked of the General, who was now lying down on the rear seat.

"Much better, Billy," was the reply. "I can't see much yet, and don't dare to try, but I'm sure it is only shock."

"Yes, sir. We shall go slower now because we are getting on the military road."

Billy's passenger made no reply. He seemed to have dropped into a stupor.

At the next crossing Billy came to an intelligence post. Two men of the military police were there.

"Take him on to Château-Thierry," the corporal advised. "You'll get help for him there easier than anywhere else. An' say, kid, lemme wipe that blood off your face so you won't look so ghastly."

Billy had forgotten the cuts on his face. He knew that there were cuts on his hands because they had bled into the gloves that he had pulled on and stiffened there. Every time that a jog in the road twisted the wheel, it pulled the cuts open and hurt him.

The General seemed to be asleep and did not notice that the car had stopped. Billy did not disturb him. He drove more slowly now but it was easier travel because he had the relief of meeting a car or truck occasionally and of knowing that our men were operating in this zone.

He was treated with every encouragement by the guards and military police whom he met, but all of them had their own duties to occupy them; there was never one who seemed able to leave his job and go on with Billy, even though he was driving a wounded general.

There was one stretch of about two miles of road that was under constant shell fire. Billy would have given worlds to have company over that road. He had heard descriptions given of the whir of the shells overhead and the various sounds they made, but all of the comparisons fell short of the real thing. To him they sounded like an express train rushing through a country station, just one track away. Fortunately only one or two burst anywhere near him and the road remained comparatively unobstructed.

It was quite dark before he reached Château-Thierry, but there were enough friendly M. P.'s to give directions so that he had no trouble. At last, as he entered the village, one of them really did climb up with him to show him just where to go.

Billy told about his adventure as briefly as pos-

sible, and about the wounded officer in the rear of the car.

"Then we'll run direct to the hospital," said the cheery M. P. "No, not here! Take the next turning. There's the place! Pull up here, and I'll go right in and tell them what you've got here."

Billy stopped his car. He heard the M. P. go into the hospital. He heard people come out. He heard some one fumbling around in the back seat. He heard a lot of talking in far-away voices. But he did not turn his head.

Some one tapped him on the arm.

"Go ahead, driver," said the voice. "The officer will be taken care of. You can put your car away."

Then as his hands relaxed from the steering wheel and he felt himself falling, falling, falling, he could faintly hear a surprised voice crying out, "Why it's just a mere boy!"

Now don't think that Billy lay for days unconscious and then woke up to find himself a hero. Nothing of the kind. He came to himself not very long after, as some one was trying to pull off his stiffened gloves, and in doing so was tearing open the cuts on his hands. He was in the surgical ward of the hospital. The gloves came away after a while. The cuts weren't so very bad when they

were cleaned and bandaged. In half an hour Billy was in a nice clean bed, very happy to be there, and convinced that he had had enough adventure to last him for a thousand years.

"I telephoned to the Paris address you gave me," said a young medical officer. "Your aunt wasn't worrying about you, because she supposed you were still with the 199th. However, they're glad to hear about you. If a pass can be secured, some one will be up to see you to-morrow."

Next day the "some one" came, and to Billy's great surprise and joy, it was his father. Doctor Ransom had finished his mission to Serbia and returned to Paris earlier than had been expected.

"As for you, Billy," he said, "I think you must now settle down in Paris and take care of Aunt Ella. There will be plenty of useful things for you to do in Paris without quite so much risk."

"Don't think that I'm likely to go hunting for that kind of thing again very soon!" said Billy. "It chaps the hands too much."

He grinned as he looked at the big snowballs of white bandages that showed where his hands were hidden. Then his face saddened.

"Poor old Dick!" he sighed. "Do you know if they have brought him in yet?"

"Yes, he was brought in this morning and will be buried to-morrow. The General hopes to be able to attend the funeral and hopes that you will ride with him. Now that his shock has passed, he can see again."

Billy had a sad hour at that funeral. He knew Dick well enough to know that he was one of those soldiers who look for orders to the Great Commander, and that even now he was with the great army of heroes whose duty has been nobly done; so there was joy even in the sadness.

A few days later Billy and Dr. Ransom left for Paris, where Billy was to live with his aunt until the Doctor was released from war service. And although Billy Ransom was still a true scout and had many more adventures, he had none that brought him into greater risk than the one in which he rescued a general.

CHAPTER XII

UNDER FIRE

When Billy Ransom was safely placed on duty in Paris at Red Cross Headquarters, Dr. Ransom, his father, felt quite comfortable about him. Dr. Ransom felt that he could now go anywhere that his orders might take him, with a mind at ease. For after the many adventures Billy had gone through, life in Paris would be tame and safe.

Billy thought the same way, but he was not disposed to grumble. It was a tremendous chance to be over in France at all, with such big things going on. There were American soldiers in Paris all the time now, and hardly an hour passed without giving Billy a chance to do a good turn to one of them, for the boys did get sadly mixed up in their assaults upon this foreign language. Then, too, Paris was not without excitement. The enemy's long-distance gun was proving to doubters that the city was not altogether off the firing line, and no one could tell

when bombing planes or Zeppelins might drop destruction from the clouds.

Who should come blundering along one morning, inquiring everywhere in loud tones for Billy Ransom, Boy Scout, but Sergeant Major McGiffon, of the 199th.

Billy was so glad to see him that he adopted French greetings. He threw his arms around the neck of the big Sergeant and hugged him.

"You sure look good to me, Billy!" McGiffon assured him. "And it sounds mighty good to hear your parleyvoo, too. I know, now, that I've got hold of somebody that can take care of all the inshoots and curves and fast deliveries that any one handling this French lingo can put over the plate. First of all, I want you to take me to see Phil."

"Phil! Is he in Paris?"

"Yes, along with some more of our boys. The old 199th has been in hot work since we left you. Some of the boys have paid all the debt to France they ever can pay. Some of the others are in the hospital."

"And Phil is in the hospital?"

"That's what they say. I've only seen him once since just before we went over. I says: 'Are you all right, Phil?' He says: 'You remember that Frenchwoman, that Madame Gazin?' I told him I did. 'Well,' he says, 'I'm going to do all I promised.' After that I only saw him once for just a few minutes. But I've heard a whole lot. I've heard his citation read, and everywhere they tell me I have got 'a brother to be proud of.'"

"Is he badly hurt?"

"I don't know, but I hope he won't be crippled. It would be pretty hard on Phil to be a cripple."

Phil's hospital was many miles beyond the city. There was a long trip underground on the Metro; a change to an electric line, and then a walk of several miles.

It was an American hospital. In the A. E. F. hospitals a relative had no difficulty about seeing a patient, so the boys were allowed to enter the ward without delay. Billy had been in many hospitals, both in France and at home, so the experience was no novelty for him. But it happened that this was Sergeant McGiffon's first experience.

It happened also that the surgeon was in the act of dressing Phil's injuries, and that the raw, ugly wounds lay exposed to view.

Billy looked up and saw the white, sick look on the Sergeant's face. With prompt action he pushed

the big fellow down on an empty bed just in time to keep him from falling to the floor.

There followed a period of confusion. The nurse left her dressings for a moment to assist Billy with his unconscious friend, but the doctor kept on at his work. Phil was greatly distressed, and some of the wounded men in the other beds looked and spoke their disgust at such conduct.

It was all over in a moment. Sergeant McGiffon sat up on the bed, his face resuming a natural color.

"I'm an awful coward," he confessed.

"You certainly are!" said Phil. "You fellows take my word for it, he is. This is Sergeant Major William McGiffon, buddies. Some of you wanted to read my citation the other day when it came. Well, here it is. But my name isn't the whole show by any means. It says also: 'Battalion Sergeant Major William McGiffon, for unusual gallantry in action; in that, at extreme peril to his own life, he advanced beyond our lines for the purpose of rescuing wounded men of his regiment, and, one after the other, brought from an exposed position to safety four wounded privates of the 199th.' I was one of those privates, buddies, so I know exactly

what kind of coward this fellow is. Jackson, over there, is another."

"Sure thing!" piped up Jackson. "All the old 199th needs is about a dozen more cowards like Sarge, an' we'll go right on to Berlin an' settle this fuss up all on our own."

"Now, calm down, you boys," interrupted the surgeon. "You're excited about nothing. Every one knows that the nerve centers that control fainting have nothing to do with bravery or cowardice. If you can't visit without a big fuss, I'll have to put the company out of the ward."

As Billy and the Sergeant Major traveled back to the city they were a strangely subdued couple. Billy was thinking about Phil McGiffon. Here he was, a mere boy, only a couple of years older than Billy himself, and he was a hero.

Sergeant McGiffon, who had won these very honors for himself, held them but lightly. He was overwhelmed by the fact that he had fainted and had made a fuss in a hospital. Gladly would he have sacrificed his battle-field honors to the cause of wiping out that stain. He felt that the humiliation would never be effaced.

Thus by very different routes these two arrived at a condition of mind that disturbed their usual

balance of sanity and prepared them for foolish action that in saner moments they might well have shunned.

Part of the sergeant's business was an errand for Captain Burnett, the division intelligence officer. It seemed that the interpreter spy, M. Marson, had been clever enough to escape again after his arrest at Tours. The French authorities at Paris had a man under observation whom they believed to be Marson. Before taking any action they would like Captain Burnett to see him. It was out of the question for the captain to make the trip to Paris, but McGiffon could identify Marson just as well. So this was one of the Sergeant's errands, and the one they undertook after leaving the hospital.

They arrived at the bureau early in the afternoon.

"This man, Marson! Yes, it is like his impudence to be here in Paris," said the officer in charge. "We can bring him in any day, but, then, again, why bring him in? He is at a little café, Rue de Cheval Blanc. We will send you with an officer. You dine at the café. We desire to know only if the man is the bogus interpreter. Wait! An officer soon will come to bear you company."

Billy and Sergeant McGiffon waited. One hour, two hours, three hours they waited.

"What's the idea, Billy? Why are we waiting here like a couple of kids?"

Sergeant McGiffon was still sore from his recent humiliation.

"Seems this Rue de Cheval Blanc is in a pretty tough place, Sarge," exclaimed Billy. "From what they say I judge it is a regular nest of spies and sneaks and thugs. A man's life there seems to have a market value of about six bits. So we must wait until we get an escort who will be able to protect us."

"I don't want any better protection than this American uniform I've got on, and what is inside of it," protested McGiffon.

"I'm not afraid to trust myself to you," said Billy.

"Well, let's not waste any more golden hours in this den of thief catchers. My leave ends to-morrow. Let's get this job done so that we can enjoy ourselves."

"All right," said Billy. "I'm not afraid. I guess I can find the way to that café in Rue de Cheval Blanc."

After crossing bridges and going through tunnels and climbing steps and descending other steps they did find Rue de Cheval Blanc. And having found

the street, their search was ended, for it contained only one café.

"How about this M. Marson person being scared away when he sees us coming?" asked McGiffon.

"Not likely," said Billy. "I'm not wearing my Scout suit, so I'm just an ordinary French boy, and American soldiers are everywhere in Paris nowadays. See, there's one across the street now! Marson didn't know you, did he?"

"No, he never had any dealings with me. I knew him because he was our interpreter. But to him I was just like any of the other boys."

"Safe enough," said Billy. "The French officers wouldn't have suggested our going to the café if they had not felt pretty sure that we wouldn't be conspicuous."

It was growing quite dark. The blinds of the café were drawn in accordance with regulations, so the boys could not look in through the windows. When they entered they found a place that looked fairly comfortable, in spite of its dismal exterior. Two or three groups were at dinner. An American soldier sat at one table drinking cognac.

"Come on, Billy, order some dinner," urged McGiffon. "I'm hungry."

And when the dinner was served, the waiter who

brought it was M. Marson! There could be no doubt whatever!

Billy saw him coming from the other end of the room.

"There he is now!" he announced to McGiffon, whose back was turned. "Don't even glance at him. Talk to me as if I were a French boy guide."

"We might as well eat a little before we go," said McGiffon, when the waiter had departed. "I don't suppose he has poisoned our food."

"We can't do anything else but eat," said Billy, unless we want to give the whole thing away. I wish that doughboy over there wouldn't talk so much and drink so much. I'm afraid he's going to get into trouble."

"One o' these S. O. S. boys who knows just exactly who's winning this war, I guess," said McGiffon. "I heard him tell one of those Frenchies a few minutes ago that the French had been in the War nearly four years and hadn't done as much as one division of American troops could do in four weeks."

"He doesn't understand what the Frenchmen are saying to him, but I do," whispered Billy. "They're getting pretty much excited."

A few minutes later it was evident that the dispute was reaching the fighting pitch.

Sergeant McGiffon left his place and walked over to the soldier.

"Better quit, buddie," he advised. "This stuff you're drinking is making you too big for your skin. Better go out and cool off, before you explode."

"What's it to you?" said the boy. "I don't belong to your outfit."

"Are you sure of that?" queried McGiffon. "My outfit's the United States Army. I guess you belong to that."

The Frenchmen, conscious of the fact that their opponent was being rebuked, broke in with a loud clamor.

"Be quiet now, be quiet!" shouted McGiffon.
"This boy's going home."

But the boy was past reason. In his anger at the interference he threw his glass at one of the Frenchmen and cut the man's face. Instantly there was a wild clamor. The whole roomful assailed the two soldiers, and from every side doors seemed to open and pour out new combatants.

Billy, endeavoring to reach McGiffon's side, found himself seized from behind. His two arms were held in a vicelike grip and he was hurried through one of the side doors into a narrow passage from which he was shoved along interminable dark stairways apparently leading up to the highest roofs of Paris. Then he was shoved into a dark little room. The door was shut with a slam that indicated a spring lock, and he was left alone.

Billy was more mad than scared. He imagined how quickly these Frenchmen would let him go when they discovered that he was an American Boy Scout. They would wish no chance of such a search as would be raised for his recovery.

Then Billy had a second thought. Just now they took him for a French boy, just a boy from the street who was acting as a guide to an American soldier. But the minute they learned who he was, this man Marson would know everything. He would know that he was suspected. He would know that the secret-service men were on his trail. And all their plans would be upset because of M. Marson's knowledge.

So there was only one thing to do about it. Billy must remain a French boy and get out of captivity the best way that he could.

The door opened in a few minutes and a big, brutal man entered.

"Give me all the money the soldier gave you," he demanded.

"He had not paid me," replied Billy. "I have only six francs."

"You lie!" shouted the man. "Give me the money!"

He raised threateningly an ugly looking whip. Now was Billy's time to declare his identity. This man would not dare to lay his whip upon an American. But Billy remembered. It would be carried to M. Marson at once. He remained silent.

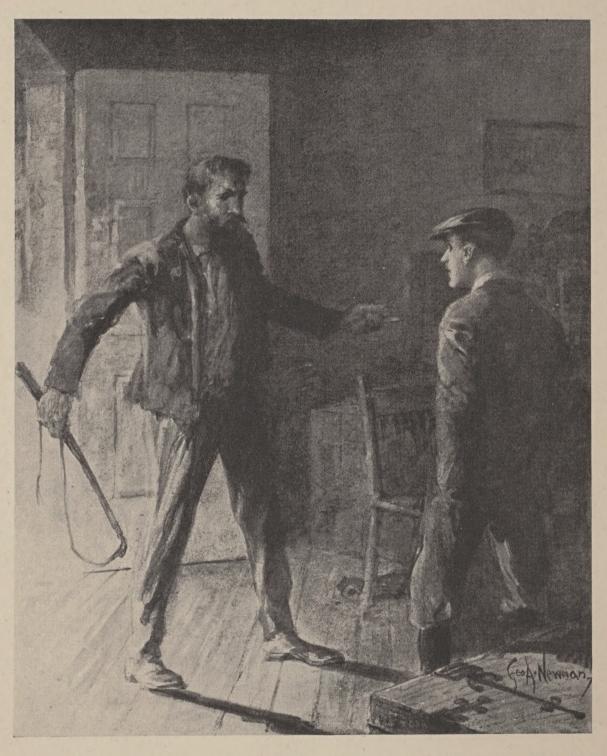
Slash! The big whip came down across Billy Ransom's back. Slash! Slash! Slash! Slash!

His body quivered and writhed with pain. He was taking wounds for which his name would never appear in a citation, nor would he be entitled to wound stripes. But he bore them without a cry.

"So! You are stubborn," said the man. "Very well! Twenty-four hours in this room without food will change you. Up there in the roof is the skylight. It is open."

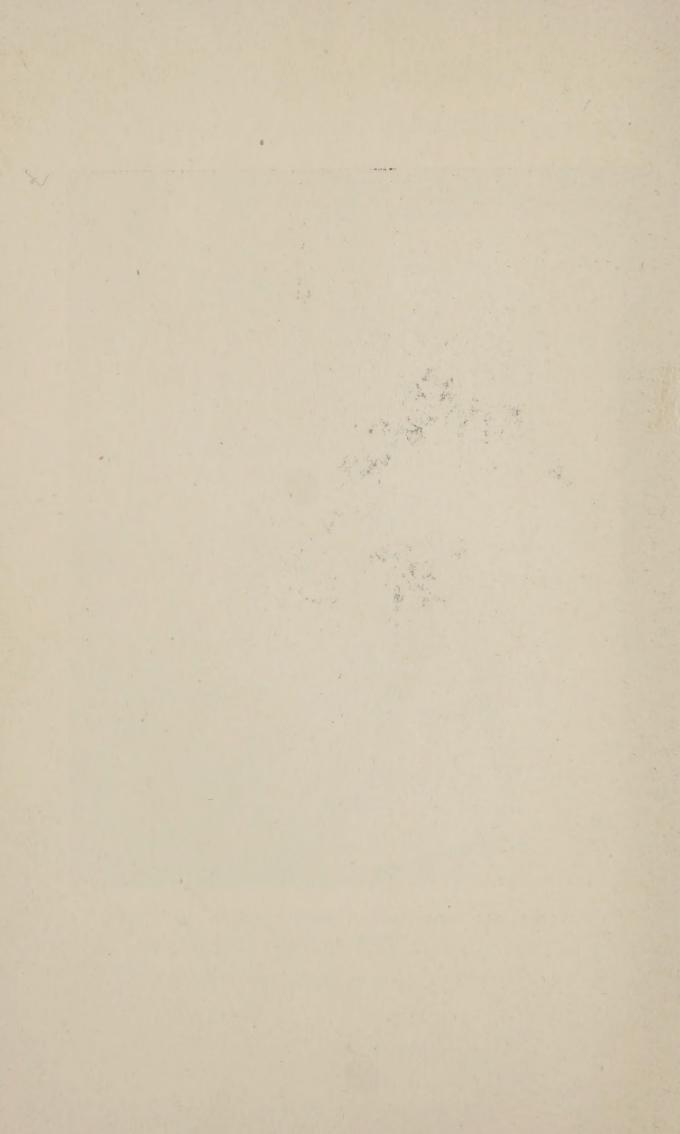
He laughed over his excellent joke as he left the room, for the skylight was twelve feet from the floor.

But Billy looked at that skylight with interest. The moon shone through it in a friendly way. Billy



"GIVE ME ALL THE MONEY THE SOLDIER GAVE YOU."

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gathered the furniture of the room together and managed to reach the opening. Next door was a similar skylight opening into a room with an open door. Billy dropped through, alighted on his feet, ran lightly downstairs and out into the street.

A big crowd was gathered a few doors away, and from its midst Billy could hear the voice of Sergeant McGiffon telling in emphatic English what he would do to the proprietor of the café if his boy guide were not produced forthwith.

"Here I am, Sarge!" he shouted, running quickly over.

"It's good that you came," said McGiffon.
"What have you been doing all this time?"

"Nothing much," said Billy. "Just trying to see if I'd win a citation if I ever got under fire."

CHAPTER XIII

WOUNDED IN ACTION

Billy Ransom had no business getting wounded. He admitted that. But since his wound came while he was going along doing his duty and staying in the place where he was supposed to stay, he did not feel so very bad about it. The wound hurt plenty, but Billy had long ago passed the place where he was terrified about a little hurt. Wounded soldiers had often told him they scarcely knew that they were hit when the wound came, and that there was a lot more pain in the dressing that followed. And of course any fellow could stand a dressing being done.

You see, Billy was in Paris in that sadly depressing period about the end of May and beginning of June, 1918, when everything seemed to be going wrong. The Germans had made their big drive of May 27 to June 1, and had actually arrived within forty miles of Paris. Château-Thierry was in their

possession, and so was the smaller town of Vaux. From Hill 204 their artillery could command the Paris road, so that it was very hazardous to make any movement of troops in the daytime.

It was at this time that the Second Division of the A. E. F. was yanked from its training area and thrown in to stem the tide of oncoming German advance. And it is now a matter of history that they did it.

But Billy Ransom did not know anything much about the Second Division. He did know that his old friends of the 199th were attached to it. But army movements were so secret that Billy had no idea where they were, and not the faintest suspicion that they were so near.

The way Billy got into the affair was through a perfectly legitimate Red Cross order. It was early in June, and among the other things that the Second Division had set itself to do was the little job of clearing all the German machine-gun nests out of Belleau Wood.

The historic Belleau Wood is not such a very big affair, judged by what Billy knew of woods in America. It is about two kilometers in length, from north to south, and has an average width of a little more than a kilometer. At this time — before it

was fought over — it contained a great deal of thick undergrowth. Its value to the Germans was as a place of concealment for the assembly of infantry and machine guns to continue their attack. They had thrown in a regiment of infantry and large numbers of trench mortars and machine guns. To the north they had heavy guns that would protect against an attack upon the wood.

But General Bundy, the commanding general of the Second Division, had no thought of allowing this hornet's nest to stay there and send forth its harassing attacks upon the movements of his troops. He realized also that the wood might be used as a point of attack to force his army off the Paris road, the avenue of all supplies, and leave him with the river Marne at his back. This would hardly be a secure position.

So, fully realizing the costly fight that lay before him, he decided that the clearance of Belleau Wood was of paramount importance and laid his plans accordingly.

Among those plans was an order to Paris to send up ten motor ambulances. The regular road was so crowded with the movement of supply and ammunition trucks, it seemed likely that better time could be made by abandoning the main road in favor of some less direct routes which would allow of more open passage.

"I think I can get along all right by following this road map," said the sergeant in charge. "But it would be awfully handy to have some one along who can parleyvoo."

So Billy was summoned from Red Cross Headquarters and appointed as official interpreter for the convoy of ten ambulances.

As it happened, Billy's services were very much in demand in making inquiries as to direction. The road map had been prepared for automobile tourists in days before there was any war. But since that time, bridges had been blown up; old roads had been abandoned and new ones had been made; the country had taken on an entirely new face.

As they drew near to their destination they met pitiful streams of refugees. They had been forced off the main roads by the constant passage of supply trucks as well as by their fear of the guns that kept up an infrequent bombardment, even at night. Billy was glad to be able to direct these poor, trembling fugitives as to the way by which he and his party had come.

At last they reached a place where their traveling

could be continued only along the main road. The sergeant called a halt.

"It is four o'clock," he said. We want to deliver these ambulances safely to the Second Division. So we'll stop right here and take tea until the sun has decided to put itself to bed in the golden west, and the little birds that fly overhead and direct the Boche artillery have gone to rest."

The main roads of France are everywhere very good, and particularly so in the neighborhood of Paris. Thirteen thousand men had been moved by motor trucks over these roads in the two preceding nights, but they were in excellent repair, excepting for shell holes.

Just before dark a runner from the Second Division came out on a motor cycle to meet them.

"I'll show you where the shells have spoiled the road," said he. "No lights on your cars to-night. I have a flash light that I can use where we can't get along without it."

It was a weird trip, riding along a shell-torn road without other light than that which came from the stars. The man on the motor cycle kept moving at a fair pace, but when they were obliged to detour from the main road on account of shell holes they

could only crawl along, feeling the way as they went.

It was late at night when they reached the Second Division. The surgeons had already sent back a great many wounded, but more than enough remained to fill the ambulances at once. Only one load of badly wounded men needing special operative work was to go back to Paris. Billy expected to ride back with the driver of that load.

"There's one more man," called a young surgeon, just as the ambulance was starting. "He won't take up much room because he's a sitting case. But if his sight is to be saved, he must go to-night."

There is an old saying to the effect that "there's always room for one more." But after you have packed "one more" in at least half a dozen different places, there does come a limit. And it seemed that this ambulance had found its limit.

"There's only one thing to do," said Billy. "He must take my place by the driver."

"That sounds like Billy Ransom," exclaimed the man with the bandaged eyes. "That you, Billy?"

"You're right, it is!" shouted Billy. "And you're Sergeant Rooney. I'm awfully glad I can give you my place."

"I know you are, Billy, or I wouldn't take it,"

said Rooney. "McGiffon will look after you, Billy."

"I didn't know that our outfit was here," said Billy. "I thought these men were all marines."

"No. The Fifth and Sixth Marines are here. But so are the Ninth and Twenty-third Infantry and the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Machine Gun Battalions, as well as some artillery. The 199th is loaned as a replacement to the Twenty-third Infantry. That's how we get in. I just got hurt to-night while I was coming down after some chow for the outfit. And the boys in my mess squad are worse hurt than I."

"Too bad, Sarge! Well, you go on to Paris and get your eyes fixed. I'll find McGiffon and get along all right. I'll look you up as soon as I get back to Paris."

It was all very well for Billy to say that he would find Sergeant McGiffon, but he soon found that it was more of a job than he anticipated.

He was beating about from place to place, making inquiries wherever he could, when he was attracted by a very pleasant aroma. Pushing his way into a small grove he found that the rolling kitchens of an entire brigade were strung around under its shelter, and scores of men were actively

at work making coffee and cooking an appetizing stew. Standing to one side were several ration carts drawn by mules.

Although the shell fire that reached this spot was only desultory, there was a constant noise of explosions, and occasionally a hit would be made at some near-by point. Most of the mules were as placid as if in the barn at home — but not all.

Just as Billy entered the grove a shrapnel explosion caused a small stampede. A restive mule, dragging his ration cart behind him, ran full tilt in Billy's direction, and he had the good fortune to catch and hold the animal just in time to save the cart from being wrecked.

- "Good work, boy!" said a sergeant who ran up to help. "Why, you're just a kid!" he exclaimed.
 - "I'm a Boy Scout," explained Billy.
 - "What are you doing up here?"
- "I came up with the ambulances. Just now I'm looking for Sergeant McGiffon of the 199th."
- "McGiffon's outfit is quite a little north of here—about three miles, I reckon. I want to send a meal up to them if I can find anybody to drive that locoed mule. All we can give 'em is one cooked meal in twenty-four hours, an' it sure is too bad to miss that."

"And they're likely to lose it because there's no one to drive the mule?"

"Not if I can help it, Buddy. But I can only do about so much. I'm short-handed. Sergeant Rooney—he's mess sergeant—he ought to send a man."

"Rooney is wounded and has been sent back to Paris," said Billy. "Load up your ration cart with as many cans as she'll carry, and let me try it."

"Good boy!" said the sergeant approvingly.

"I'll set you on a little road that will come pretty near their place. You can't go very far wrong because there'll be somebody posted every little ways."

Fortunately the little road was not so very lonely. Much to his surprise, Billy was scarcely frightened at all. He had been under shell fire before, so it was not an entirely new experience. And he seemed like a person whose mental faculties are anesthetized. The shells screamed overhead, whizzed through the trees, struck objects repeatedly; but all of Billy's anxiety seemed centered upon the effect that these missiles would have upon the mule. Could he keep the animal quiet enough to carry the food without too much spilling? The big cans swung in their racks, but he felt sure that but little

was lost. Could he keep the mule's gyrations under control for another half-mile—long enough to reach the 199th with an unspilled meal still hot and savory?

Fortune favored the 199th. They saw him coming. They did not recognize the driver, but their reception of his load was enthusiastic beyond a fault. Billy left them to the joyful work of unloading. He stood quietly by, hoping that some one would recognize him, but not until Sergeant McGiffon came did any one make a sign.

"Billy Ransom!" he exclaimed. "It is! It's Billy! What you doing up here with this ration cart?"

Billy gave a brief explanation.

"Believe me, you did an act of mercy when you turned mule-skinner. These boys haven't had a good meal for a week. We have two hundred men here, and all we've had lately is our reserve ration—hard bread and canned meat. One day they had to send us the French ration. Our fellows declared it was monkey meat and went hungry rather than eat it. This stuff to-night is the best we've had since we got up here.

[&]quot;Pretty badly scared, eh?"

[&]quot;Not scared for myself, but for the cart. Now

that it's all over, I begin to be scared about myself. I don't feel like going back alone, Sarge. I'd rather wait until you are sending somebody in."

"You shall, Billy. To-night you can snuggle down beside me. I've got a little dugout all to myself. And to-morrow I'll take you back to the ambulance station."

But that was the night of June 10, and it was for the eleventh that the second great attack on Belleau Wood was set. Sergeant McGiffon could not leave his duties for a moment. He was called away on urgent matters and did not come back.

Billy could see only one logical course of action. The mule was there and so was the ration cart. But there was no driver. Billy put himself in charge of the animal, who now seemed to recognize him as his personal attendant, and they picked their way back to the rolling kitchens.

"You're the best help I've got," said the officer.

"Give me a hand here."

So all of that day, while the marines and the 199th were making history in Belleau Wood, Billy was making coffee and "slum" not many miles away.

"Don't you want to try to find the 199th again?" asked the mess sergeant that evening.

And this time Billy Ransom and his mule penetrated the famous fighting ground right into the wood itself, for although the Germans were not entirely driven out, the American forces were victorious and were entrenched to stay.

Billy had no thought of the journey that he was undertaking. He simply followed the trail of the company as he could pick it up, and after six miles he once more brought nourishment to a tired and famished set of men.

And it was in Belleau Wood, a place to be forever famous in the history of the American Expeditionary Forces in the World War that Billy received his wound.

He had arrived safely. The ration cart had been unloaded. Then a shell burst a hundred feet away, and one of the flying fragments struck the mule. He started at a gallop. Billy attempted to stop him, but his ungrateful protégée dragged him along and pulled the cart over him.

When Billy was lifted up it was found that he had a number of lacerations over the right eye and a broken collar bone. The mule was never seen again.

Two days later, in the eye ward of the Paris hospital, Billy met Sergeant Rooney.

"Well, Billy, you've kept your promise," said Rooney. "You said you'd look me up in the hospital, but I didn't count on you doing it this way. Were you wounded in action?"

"I'll say I was," said Billy. "There certainly was plenty of action. And yet a veteran like you might not call it such. I think I'd rather say that my wounds are the result of a drive that I conducted during the capture of Belleau Wood."

CHAPTER XIV

FOURTH OF JULY IN PARIS

Things were looking pretty well for Billy Ransom on the eventful day that marked the Fourth of July, of the year 1918, in Paris. There was a glorious hubbub everywhere. Never had the people of Paris felt quite so cordial to the American soldiers. They had been learning in the last few weeks something of the mettle of these men.

It was true enough that the German troops were near to Paris; they were still encamped along the river Marne; the noise of their big guns could still be heard in the city. But the Americans had held them from further advances; had cleaned them out of Belleau Wood; had retaken Bouresches; had occupied and kept the ruined town of Vaux. It was evident to any one that these Americans were of good quality; that they would do or die. There was a feeling of hope. Victory was in the air. It was a great day.

Billy, being a noncombatant, had been sent to the beautiful little hospital at Neuilly. There he was made much of by the nurses and attendants. His broken collar bone was doing very well and the bandages would be removed from his eye in another day or two. Because he had received his injuries in carrying aid to the American troops at Belleau Wood he was counted worthy of special honor, and so, on this Fourth of July morning, Madame Lyons sent her own car to take Billy to see the great parade.

True, this motor car of Madame Lyons was more honorable than trustworthy. It had been a good machine in August, 1914. It had done some service after that, but not very much. Petrol was needed for war work; it could not be wasted on pleasure cars. The car was not suited to the rough work of the army, so it had been laid aside. And to-day, for the first time in years, a small amount of fuel had been provided and it was placed in commission once more in honor of the American Fourth of July.

This arrangement was splendid for Billy. He could not safely mingle with the great crowds on foot, yet he was very anxious to see the parade and to celebrate July the Fourth in proper fashion.

"If you have room, would you mind giving a seat to a wounded American soldier?" Billy asked. "He is a friend of mine, named Sergeant Rooney. He was wounded about the time I was hurt, and has been in the hospital ever since having his eyes treated. He can see now, and he would like to take in the parade."

So the antique limousine coughed its way around to the hospital where Rooney was under treatment, and Billy went in to see the ward surgeon about getting him a pass.

Rooney proved to be a great acquisition to the party. He was a decided social acquisition, for he was as merry as ever, and could now get along very well with ordinary French conversation. But he brought also to the conveyance the material advantage of enthroning a wounded American soldier. Every one gave the little car consideration and finally it was allowed the privilege of a parking place on a little alley that overlooked the Champs-Élyseés, where the entire parade would pass in review.

When at last the Stars and Stripes waved proudly aloft and the soldiers who represented his own dear country marched by, Billy did not join in the uproarious cheering that broke from the throng

around him. He sat very quietly in his seat, his head bared in respect, a bright color flushing his cheeks, and his eyes filled with tears that had come quite unbidden and unexpected.

"Ain't it great?" exclaimed Rooney as the procession passed. "I was in Washington last Fourth and I saw such a parade as I never expected to see again in my life. But it didn't compare with this."

"No parade could," replied Billy. "This is more than a parade. We aren't just shouting here. We are answering a mighty question. It's just as if our boys had stepped aside a few minutes from Belleau Wood and the other places where they've been doing their mighty work, long enough to repeat the words of the song, 'Lafayette, We Are Here.' France has been wondering if America was going to do anything but talk. To-day we look up from the job we are doing just long enough to say, 'Here we are!' Our part in this is more than a parade; it's a ceremony."

Rooney clapped Billy on the back and shouted his approval in such hearty style that Madame Lyons and the young French officer, her nephew, laughingly asked what could be the matter.

"It is Professor Billy," explained Rooney in his best French. "He's little, but he has picked out

the very spirit of this celebration and put it in capsule form. I'd tell you, but my French isn't the kind that you learned at your school. Get Billy to tell you."

"Now that the parade is over we shall drive to a quieter place and then he will tell us," said Madame Lyons.

But they were not destined to drive anywhere immediately. The driver manipulated his spark and his gas throttle and gave an energetic spin to the crank. Alas, there was no response! Then he advanced the spark and tried it again. Still no response. Lieutenant Lyons took up the mute challenge. The result was the same. Sergeant Rooney begged to be allowed to try, but his actual participation was not allowed, and his advice went for nothing. All of Billy's experience was at the chauffeur's service, but he seemed singularly disinclined to make use of it. The motor car, having been out of the service nearly four years, had apparently decided that it had done enough for a soft, poorly exercised machine on its first day, and had struck work.

There were any number of people to give advice and any number to offer assistance, for the mutiny of the motor car had occurred in a very crowded

quarter. But all of their advice and assistance availed nothing.

"But, gentlemen, this will never do," cried an excited helper to the crowd. "Here on this, their own Fourth of July, are we to leave our American brothers, brave soldiers, those who have already shed their blood for us, to die by a Paris roadside, exposed to the heat of our sun and the downpour of our rain. Never! I myself will push this machine with my own two hands."

He suited the action to the word by giving a mighty push to the rear of the car. Immediately the excited crowd took up the challenge, perhaps from a desire to honor the wounded Americans, perhaps in sheer merriment.

The little car was pushed out into the Avenue of the Champs-Elyseés. Some one procured a cable such as is used in towing disabled motor cars, and the excited mob propelled the car at a good speed along the famous avenue, some pulling at the rope, others pushing on the rear and projecting parts.

Rooney was immensely pleased and laughed and shouted with the mob in uproarious fashion.

"I don't suppose an American soldier ever had such a ride as this along this famous avenue," said Billy. "It's like the old times when the crowds used to take the horses out of the carriage so that they might have the honor of pulling some returning hero through the streets."

"I'm willing to be a hero for to-day, Billy," agreed Rooney. "When you're an old man you can tell your grandchildren how the people of Paris drew you and Sergeant Rooney beneath the Arc de Triomphe while it was still swathed in sandbags for protection from German shells."

"It will be something to tell about if the police don't stop the crowd before they get that far," said Billy.

But the police seemed to have no instructions in the matter. If the crowd wanted to honor American soldiers in celebrating America's big day let them do it. And beneath the celebrated Arc de Triomphe (de l'Étoile) at the head of the great boulevard, the arch was shrouded in sandbags. The crowd pushed the old motor car in great enthusiasm.

Fortunately there was a repair shop but a short distance further on, and at the earnest solicitation of Lieutenant Lyons they wound up by rolling the car into the yard of this establishment.

They were not all through yet. A Paris crowd that made up its mind to honor American heroes in

the year 1918 was apt to do it very thoroughly. They pressed around the car to salute les Americains, and the ardent salutations offered were enough to embarrass Billy greatly. Sergeant Rooney pretended to enjoy them, but as a means of escape he proposed that Billy should make a speech.

"Yes," agreed Lieutenant Lyons; "let him tell that interesting thing about the spirit of this celebration."

The crowd roared its noisy approval.

"What is your Fourth of July?" shouted one man. "Why not have it on the Fourteenth of July, and join up with France?"

"It is a fine idea," replied Billy, "but it could not be. The Fourth of July is the birthday of our nation. We cannot change our birthday now that we are nearly one hundred and fifty years old."

"What do you mean by your birthday? Tell us. We do not all know your American history."

"We date our birth from the Fourth of July—1776—when the Declaration of Independence was voted upon and accepted. Men representing all the American colonies signed their names to this declaration that brought into being the United States of America. They were just good, substantial citi-

zens like you are, merchants, farmers, doctors, lawyers. Only two of them were soldiers, but they all had fighting blood. They had to have that, for it would take more than saying they were free to make them free."

The little speech seemed to give the crowd something to reflect upon, for it was not so noisy.

"We are also a republic," said one. "Why is it that the freedom of France is mentioned but little outside of our own country?"

"I wish that I could tell you," replied Billy. "I am only a boy. If my father were here he could answer that. I have heard him say that many countries have fought for freedom, but their aim has not been much higher than to secure property rights, the right to vote, the right to hold office. I do not say that France is among those countries, but perhaps she is.

"You see, the Pilgrim Fathers went to America because they wanted to be free to worship God. They put up with all kinds of hardships to get the kind of freedom they wanted. It was a long time afterward that the colonies decided to break with England, but the people were still very much like the early Pilgrims. They honored both God and His people, and showed that the whole spirit of Ameri-

canism was to secure to all men the things with which the Creator had endowed them. If men die for these things they die well!"

"They do!" declared a voice. "And our American brothers are dying with our own men that we all may live. Vive les Americains! Vive l'Amerique!"

The crowd melted away. The little car was willing to work again, for its trouble had been nothing more than a clogged supply pipe. The chauffeur's cranking was rewarded by a good, clear song from the engine with never a cough, and the car started its homeward journey.

"That was a fine little speech you made, my little scout," said Lieutenant Lyons.

"It was just something I have heard my father say," said Billy.

"It is a great truth," said the lieutenant. "You Americans have brave men and so have we."

"I'm finding it out better every day," said Billy.

"Here, too," declared Sergeant Rooney. "I'm not a philosopher, like my friend Billy; I'm just an ordinary American doughboy. But I've been acquiring a whole lot of education since I came to France. I've been finding out things about my French cousins that have made me open my eyes. If

all of our boys that come over here get as much foolish stuff knocked out of their heads as I have, and as much new material put in, the people of America are going to have some very warm feelings for the French after we go back."

They delivered Sergeant Rooney at his hospital without further adventure.

"If you can take me to my aunt's residence in the Avenue de la Madeleine I will stay with her tonight," said Billy.

"Your aunt is a Frenchwoman?"

"She was born in America, but she married a French surgeon years ago. He is Major Deschamps. He is now at the front."

Billy thanked Madame Lyons for the great pleasure she had given him and said good-by to Lieutenant Lyons and the chauffeur when he left the car.

He found his aunt packing a traveling bag. She was evidently in great distress.

"Billy, I'm so glad you've come," she cried. "I am getting ready to leave Paris. Your Uncle Henri is reported missing. I cannot believe that he is dead. I am going where I can search for him."

"Let me go with you!" begged Billy.

"No, Billy, you could do no good with me. Your

duty is here. I am not complaining, Billy. If Henri has sacrificed his life, it is for God and our country. But I cannot give up without making sure. But for you, your duty is here."

Only a little while before Billy had said to the crowd, "If men die for these things they die well." It had come home, right to his door. Now he must be man enough to do his duty.

CHAPTER XV

JUST A Y. M. C. A. MAN

There is one very valuable thing that you might do to help in the rescue of your uncle, Billy," continued Madame Deschamps. "You might secure the interest of the Y. M. C. A. men. Henri always gave a great deal of help to the Y. M. C. A., as long as he was here in Paris. It was a Y. M. C. A. man who brought the last word we have of him."

Billy found some Y. M. C. A. men who had known Major Deschamps and secured their interest.

"The man you want to look up is Jones," said one of them. "Jones was up in that very district. He was one of the men sent to the French Army in response to Marshal Foch's request for some Y. M. C. A. men. John Paul Jones is just the man. He was wounded himself, and that's why he is in Paris now."

"Is he in this building?" asked Billy.

"No, but I can give you his address. He is an awfully jolly fellow, and if he can help you about your uncle he will do it very gladly. Just now he is in the hospital."

"Wounded?" asked Billy. "What a lot of you Y. M. C. A. men have been wounded lately!"

"Yes, it's getting to be no distinction whatever. But Jones is not badly wounded. He was hit over a rib and because it was difficult to bandage, he lost a lot of blood. Then he chose a bad place to faint away in, because it had been shelled with gas shells and some of the gas still lingered. He got enough to give him a lot of distress. Besides, he was without food for five days. But he is doing finely now. I saw him yesterday."

"Some of these people who tell about the easy time you Y. M. C. A. men have ought to go up and see him," suggested Billy.

"He could tell about that easy time, for a fact. But we aren't paying any attention to our critics. A list of our killed and wounded would answer them any time. I myself, have had two turns in the hospital."

Mr. Jones was at a French hospital in a central location of the city, easy to reach. They found him, dressed and sitting by his bed, a little, bald, spec-

tacled man, who might have come direct from keeping books in some big New York office. Billy was obliged to admit that he did not look very imposing.

"Can I tell you about Major Deschamps?" said he. "I can tell you something about him and also about two of his men, Paul Desgouttes and Victor Renard. I admire Major Deschamps more than any soldier of my acquaintance. He is my idea of a hero."

"If you'll allow me to state a blunt, unpleasant truth, Jones, you don't look very much like a man who specializes in heroes," said the other Y. M. C. A. man.

"No, I suppose not. I look like a man who sells jewelry, perhaps, for that's what I did for twenty years. Just the same, when this opportunity came to serve my country and France, and the Y. M. C. A. all in one, I think one of the big things in my head was that it might mix me up with some heroes, even if I was nothing but a business man in the forties. Mind you, I didn't ask to be a hero myself! All I wanted was to serve them. And when I had a chance to do something for Major Deschamps, that was one of those opportunities."

"When did you see Major Deschamps?" asked Billy.

"It must be at least a month ago. You know it was on May 27 that the Germans broke through our line between Rheims and Soissons in their salient advance. Major Deschamps was not with the regiment to which I was attached, but both our regiments suffered terrible losses. Word came to us that a little bunch of a dozen French soldiers, all of them more or less wounded, were gathered in a cave. They had water, but were greatly in need of food and surgical attention. You know how it is in these military operations a few men in distress can't be considered against the welfare of the mass. The success of the army is what matters, not the escape of a little handful.

"So there was no one except myself to do anything for this little handful of men in the cave. It happened that a shell had made a direct hit on my canteen the day before, when I was out taking some stuff to the boys who were at work, and the whole thing had been blown to atoms, destroying all my stock in trade. So I was pretty nearly a useless individual. This made me think I might as well beg some surgical dressings from our medical supply officer and try to reach those men in the cave.

You see, one big reason for requesting Y. M. C. A. men for the French forces was to maintain their morale. And the fellows in our outfit worried so much about that little handful of men, it was evident that their morale would get quite a boost if they knew that some noncombatant like myself had started to do something. Anyway, I had no chocolate to give out, no baby organ to play, and not a phonograph record to put on what was left of the talking machine.

"So I crept through our wire one night just about dusk and managed to make pretty good progress, being guided by some landmarks that I remembered and a luminous compass. In the morning I was behind the German lines, for they had made quite an advance toward Paris by that time—more's the pity. I knew there were plenty of Germans left at various posts, however, and although the cave was only about three miles away, I stood quite a good chance of having some one interfere very seriously with my progress.

"I picked my way very cautiously, and by late afternoon I figured that I was getting near. I knew the cave pretty well, having been there before, because when our regiment was holding that sector we had used it as a kind of cooling room for

our perishable stuff. Our trenches had been only a little way ahead.

"I got a great scare about that time, for I heard a party of men somewhere near me. I supposed they were out on the job of cleaning up stragglers. I didn't believe they would find the men in the cave unless they had specific directions, because the approach was well hidden by heavy brush. But what I was afraid of was that they would clean up me.

"There were shell holes in plenty, but most of them only hid you just as long as no one looked over the top. Plain, ordinary shell holes are no good for playing 'hide and seek' with Germans. But — as luck would have it — the first one that I crawled into was of the exceptional kind. A big shell had torn into the roots of a tree and not only had it made a hole big enough for a subway, but it had carried the tree down into it.

"As the tree lay, there was just barely room for me to squeeze beneath it after I had shoved in my precious bag of dressings. I tell you I was thankful then that I was little and skinny and bald! That place was such a tight fit that if I had had a full head of hair, some of it would have been left outside. "They went away from there after a time, but I thought I'd better stay awhile, though I did venture to crawl from beneath the trees and stretch my muscles. I was just about making up my mind that I might safely take the last lap of my journey—not more than a hundred yards, I thought—when I heard the prowlers coming back again.

"Back I dodged beneath my tree. It never would do to have those fellows find me and my supplies so near to that cave. They would be sure to smell something. This time they came right down into my shell hole, going very, very carefully, just as if there might be a big force of the enemy ready to spring on them at any time. 'They're cautious bodies, these Germans,' I thought.

"And then one of them, quite close to me, said something in a low voice. And he spoke in French! 'It must be right about this spot,' he said. 'Pierre described the big tree that overhung the cave and the underbrush that covered it. This must be the spot. I believe this shell hole has'—

"'Wait!' I interrupted, realizing that these men must be on the same mission. 'Don't be alarmed at my voice. I am coming out. I am with the French forces and I can tell you what you want to know.'"

"When I crawled out I recognized my old friend,

Major Deschamps. With him were the two men of whom I told you. They were bringing relief to the men in the cave who were not even of their regiment.

"'Pierre Despard came to us with the story,' the Major explained. 'His brother Jacques is one of those in the cave. I could not have left my duties, but as it happened I had obtained a short leave of absence, and the officer who was to relieve me had just arrived. So, of course, I came. Old Despard is the *concierge* of the building in which I live, and I could not have gone back to my home and told him that I had left his son Jacques in this cave.'

"So the Major, with these two volunteers, Paul and Victor, had left their safe positions, crawled through the wire entanglements, and threaded their way to this place by the aid of a rude map drawn by Pierre. They have never been stationed here and did not know the place as I knew it. So they had missed the cave. This is evidence that it was well concealed, for they had searched for it carefully.

"I showed them the exact direction, and in a few minutes we were with that little group of eight wounded and four dead. There had been one other, but he had become quite crazed by his wounds and had escaped from the cave in the night. "Taking care of eight wounded men is no great job for a military surgeon like Major Deschamps, who had often done over a hundred operations in a single day, and he soon had them placed in suitable dressings. Meantime I had given the famished men some food which heartened them a great deal. I think I told you there had been no lack of water, as a little stream trickled through the cave.

"'We must lose no time,' said the Major. 'Perhaps the sensible thing to do would be to yield yourselves as German prisoners, but if you had wanted to do that you would not have been suffering in this cave.'

"'Not that,' declared the men. 'Never that!'

"'Our food supply won't hold out very long. You have had a little food. Two of you can travel this evening, now that you are patched up. Mr. Jones will give you a good meal in about two hours. Then you will start. Victor and Paul will go with you carrying Captain Matin on a stretcher that we will make. It is no good for the Captain to wait, because a compound fracture of the leg won't heal enough to let him walk on it inside of a month. After twenty-four hours of care and feeding, two of you others may be able to try the journey. Mr. Jones will try to see you through. The rest of you

will stay here with me until our comrades have pushed the Germans back from the Marne. May it be soon!'

"While the gallant Major had turned his speech so as to leave a little hope for everyone, I knew that he had done no more than outline a series of forlorn hazards. I had a shrewd suspicion that the best he expected was that by starting these men out from the cave they would at least perish in the open with a man's chance for life, rather than lie in the cave until too weak to drag their bodies from its shelter. Even a German prison camp gave a chance. But of these three men who were to stay under the Major's care after that second night — one needed to be no doctor to know that they would never walk out of that cave. What release was there for the Major if our troops did not drive the Germans back?

"A very good stretcher was made for the Captain, and with the two less seriously wounded men following them, Paul and Victor took up their burden and started on their long journey shortly after dark. Heroes! Yes, they were heroes. And the grandest thing about it all is that they got safely through. No one will ever know the terrible trip they made, stumbling through the weary miles in

the black night with that improvised stretcher, and stopping every few yards to give aid to one of the two men afoot who had given out. But they made it, although they could not cover the whole distance that first night.

"I was more fortunate with my two men. The Major had picked the easy lot for me, I suppose. That extra twenty-four hours of rest and feeding bucked them up surprisingly. Anyway we got safely through. It wasn't exactly a picnic trip. We came awfully close to some German patrols. But it's much easier to get through the lines going out than going in. Next morning I heard that Paul and Victor, with all three of their party, had come safely through an hour or two before we did.

"And the Major? I can't tell more about him. Before I left the cave we buried one of the three whom he had promised to see through. A second seemed little likely to last out the night that I left. But the third, although utterly helpless, would live as long as the food supply remained. I begged the Major to let me stay in his place. I also suggested that we might carry this man out on a litter. But neither would do. His case demanded daily surgical dressing, and a litter was impracticable.

"So Major Deschamps stayed there to treat his

patient. And if they have found food they may both be still alive; or they may have been discovered by the Germans and made prisoners; or they may be even now working their way toward our lines. Who knows? It is a month ago. A wounded man may make much progress in a month.

"I have reported all this at headquarters, so I fear there is nothing new about it to carry to your aunt, Billy. Major Deschamps is carried as 'missing' because there is so much uncertainty as to his fate. But he has done a man's work, whatever the outcome, and when I think of Major Deschamps, I think of a hero."

CHAPTER XVI

CUT OUT FOR A HERO

Billy Ransom was a very proud boy in those days of July and August, 1918, when the American successes became so evident to every one. He mourned our losses very deeply, but none the less was he proud of the men who had fallen.

Billy knew all of the Red Cross "searchers" in the Paris hospitals, and they knew him and called on him to do all manner of service for them. One of them he had learned to like particularly because she came from Billy's own town and knew a great many of the very same people.

- "You remember the Seldem family, Billy?" said this young lady one morning.
- "I guess I do," said Billy. "Buddy Seldem went to my school."
 - "Was his name Thorndyke?"
 - "I think maybe it was. It was some name like

that, because everybody called him Buddy so's not to have to use it."

"Well, in the list of inquiries I have to-day there is one for Thorndyke W. Seldem, and I noticed the same name in the list of 'missing' in the Herald a few days ago."

"Come to think of it, so did I," said Billy. "I remember noticing that he was from our town. But I never thought of Buddy Seldem. Buddy was too young. He was a grade lower than I in school."

"But he might have been older than you."

"No, he was just about my age. I remember because when I joined the Boy Scouts I tried to get Buddy to join, and he was just the right age. So you see it couldn't be Buddy."

"But I think it is, Billy. You know there are a good many boys in the army who are two or three years younger than the ages they gave at enlistment. They were big boys, and wild to enlist, and didn't much care what they said."

"Well, Buddy was a big fellow. The last time I saw him he could have passed for eighteen anywhere, and he wasn't quite fifteen."

"Thorndyke W. Seldem is the same as Buddy Seldem, I'm quite sure, Billy. And the reason I'm telling you is because one of the boys of his outfit is here and tells me that he is quite sure that Bill Seldem—it seems he was christened 'Bill' when he enlisted—is in a small French hospital somewhere near Vaux. He says that they were both in the fighting at Château-Thierry, and both were hurt. It was pretty hard to get over the roads back to Paris just then and they took as many as possible to this French hospital, and he is sure that Bill Seldem was one of them."

"Want me to send a cable to his folks, Miss Bailey?" asked Billy.

"I don't like to do that until I'm quite sure," replied Miss Bailey.

"Then you would like me to go to the hospital and see him?"

"That's it, Billy. But I've heard that it isn't a very easy matter to get to that hospital. I made inquiry because I thought I'd go myself. They say the hospital is quite safe when you get there, but there is no train service; you have to go by motor cycle or ambulance or any way you can; and the road is exposed to shell fire part of the way. I talked to an ambulance driver who makes the trip occasionally, and he flatly refused to take me or any other woman."

"I can get through all right," asserted Billy.
"I've been on worse trips than that."

"So you have, Billy; but I hate to send a mere boy where I can't go myself."

"I guess I'm no more of a boy than Bud Seldem is," insisted Billy. "Sometimes I wish I had enlisted and got to be a hero myself. I could enlist right now in the French Army, and no questions asked."

"Why, Billy Ransom!" laughed Miss Bailey.
"To hear you talk like that, when you are one of the most useful boys I know."

"Maybe I am useful, Miss Bailey. But I tell you that sometimes I get mighty tired of being just a messenger boy to fetch and carry for people. I always feel like that when I hear of boys like Bud Seldem doing things."

"Would you have lied about your age, Billy Ransom?"

Billy's gaze dropped and he blushed.

"You know you would not. And your father can tell you that these young boys who have stolen into the army when under age have generally done more harm than good. But that's no reason why we should not do what we can for the Seldem boy."

"Leave it to me," said Billy. "I don't know how I'll do it, but I will."

Miss Bailey watched him as he hurried away. "I suppose it never occurs to Billy Ransom that he really is a hero," thought she. "Perhaps people in general don't think so, either, but I do."

Billy certainly didn't think so. The ambulance that ran to the hospital near Vaux was a French car and had a Frenchman for a driver. He was a stranger to Billy but the boy soon struck up an acquaintance with him. Anything that the American Red Cross desired this driver would grant, for he himself was a disabled soldier who owed much to the Americans. Despard was his name, he told Billy.

- "Not Pierre Despard?" asked Billy.
- "The very same," the soldier admitted.
- "And you have a brother Jacques?"
- "I did have a brother named Jacques. Whether I now have, God alone can tell."
- "But you knew my uncle, the French surgeon, Major Deschamps?"
- "Your uncle was one of God's finest men. May you be as great and as brave a man!"
- "Yes, my uncle is a great man. I speak of him as living for I do not think that he is dead."

"We shall see," Pierre Despard. "If he is living we shall very soon hear from him and he will tell us also about Jacques. Whatever I can do for a kinsman of your uncle's I will do."

"I want to go to the hospital with you this afternoon," said Billy.

"It is a dangerous ride. Let me be your messenger."

"No. I must go myself," Billy asserted. "And I would like to go to-day."

"I am doing you no favor," said Pierre Despard, "but be ready at one o'clock."

The ride to the hospital was uneventful until within six miles of their destination.

"Now we shall have a bad time of it, perhaps," said the driver. "It depends on the mood they are in. Sometimes they let us go without a shot."

"I'm surprised that they should waste their ammunition on a single ambulance," said Billy.

"It is their spite. They wish to show that they still command this road. They are not very likely to make a hit, but at least they will terrify us. They will keep the road from being used."

"Several times I have been on roads that were under shell fire, but I don't seem to get used to it," admitted Billy. "I've been under fire for four years and I'm not used to it yet," replied the soldier. "But we have our work to do. Why bother?"

"That's it," said Billy, "we have our work to do. It may not be the most important work in the world but it's what we have to do."

They drove two miles without seeming to attract any attention.

"Two or three minutes more and we shall be out of range," said the driver. "They seem to be feeling in a genial mood to-day."

He had scarcely finished his remarks before the screech of a shell came whistling through the air. Billy ducked and cowered. His companion did not stir in his seat.

"Too high!" he said contemptuously. "It will pass us. I have learned when to duck in my four years. These Boches are not up to the standard. And now they are too late, for we shall be out of range."

"I'm ashamed," said Billy. "I'm not cut out for a hero."

"We have a saying in the French Army that a hero is a soldier who happens to be noticed at a rash moment," said the driver.

The rest of the drive was very enjoyable. The

hospital was a large, fine *château* that had been converted to its present use by the charitable enterprise of the owner. It was quite safe from shell fire, and the Germans were not at that time bombing hospitals.

"We are very glad that you have come," said the superintendent when Billy had stated his errand. "The patient of whom you speak is here. His wound is not so very serious, but he is low, very low."

"You mean that he is in danger?" asked Billy.

"We hope not, but possibly. He is also what you in America call homesick. He longs and cries for his American friends. We would have sent him in to an American hospital had the roads been safer, for he makes no recovery here. So we are very glad for you to come."

"I'm glad, too," said Billy. "And I'd like to see him as soon as possible. If he's the fellow I think he is, I ought to be able to cheer him up a little."

If Billy had not been prepared in advance he would have found it hard to recognize his old schoolmate, Buddy Seldem, in the long, thin, sallow figure that he found in this French hospital. But Bud, though totally unprepared for the joyful surprise, found no difficulty in recognizing Billy.

"It's Billy Ransom!" he shouted in a thin, high voice. "You are Billy Ransom, aren't you? Don't you dare say you are somebody else!"

The look of anxiety that came into the boy's face was quite pathetic.

"I'm Billy Ransom, all right," said Billy. "And you are Buddy Seldem. I'm here to look after you."

"Billy, you've saved my life. I'll never be able to tell you how glad I am to see you. But you've saved my life. I'm dying in this hospital. I know I am. Don't go away, Billy. Stay by me as long as I need you. Please, Billy; you must!"

"Who said anything about going away, Buddy? I've only just come."

"Yes, but I want you to stay. You must stay, Billy. I can't bear to have you go. These people here are all good, especially one or two of the nurses that try to talk English to me, but I'm homesick, Billy. I need some one like you, some one that isn't strange, some one that means home."

"Don't be afraid, Buddy; I'll look after you," Billy assured him. "You mean a lot to me, too, you know, because I'm just as far away from home as you are."

"So you are, Billy. It's different with you,

though. You haven't played the fool like I have."

"Don't talk like that, Bud. You're just excited. You'll feel differently when you are better."

"No, I won't. And I'm glad to say it. I'm glad to get it off my mind. I tell you I was just a fool, Billy Ransom. You know how old I am. You know that neither father nor mother had any idea that I would try to enlist. You know how I ran off and passed myself off to the recruiting officer as eighteen. I thought I was pretty clever then, but I know now that I just played the fool."

"Never mind, Buddy. That's ancient history now, and you've been a good soldier."

"No, I haven't been a good soldier. Our army officers knew what they were about when they set eighteen as the age limit. Boys younger than that are not fit for the training. They can't keep up. They get in the way. They are a drag on their company. That's what I've been most of the time, Billy, a drag on the company."

"Don't talk about it, Bud. Tell me when you heard from home last."

"No. I've got to tell you this first, Billy. It's on my mind awfully heavy, and there's more to it than you think. I was a drag. I believe that it was because I was dragging behind that I and

another fellow got wounded. And there's more to it than that, Billy. Bend down so I can talk to you in a whisper. Some of these fellows understand a little English and you never can tell. Now, listen!"

He whispered something in Billy's ear that made the young scout very serious indeed.

"No, you wouldn't do that. It would be the worst thing you could do. Your people might never know, but that would not change the fact. You just couldn't do that, Bud. It would be cowardly."

"But I could, Billy. I just tell you life isn't worth living to me if I've got to go up on the front line again. I don't worry about my wound being bad; I worry about the likelihood of its getting well. I'll just slip my bandages some night and"——

"Now you stop right there, Bud! Your mind isn't working right. You know I always played fair, don't you?"

"Yes, Billy, you always were on the level."

"Very well. On my honor as a scout I promise to look after you, and I know that I can promise that you won't have to go up front again. You see I know some people who have influence, and I know just how old you really are, and — well, I can fix it. I'm sure I can."

"Billy, that gives me the first happiness I've had

for a month. I'll be awfully glad to see my mother and father again."

"You will before long, Bud. The War is going to be over soon. Every one can see it, now. We are winning, Bud. You just sit tight and hold on to yourself."

Billy sent a message to Miss Bailey that night—a long letter. But he himself stayed at the hospital. He was still there three days later when Pierre Despard brought the good news that the Germans had again been driven back and that the road to Paris was now quite safe.

A few days later a special board of examiners made its report on the case of Thorndyke W. Seldem and recommended that he be returned to the United States, S. C. D., which means "Surgeon's Certificate of Disability."

"It's a little different from going home with a D. S. C.," Buddy said to Billy, at the station. "But the transposition of the letters doesn't disappoint me. I wasn't cut out for a hero, Billy. The big thing for me is that I'm going home."

CHAPTER XVII

NO TRADE WITH THE ENEMY

Billy Ransom was still in Paris in August, 1918. There was plenty of work and plenty of excitement. After the splendid movement against the German flank begun by Marshal Foch on July 18, it seemed as if the tide of victory had become decisive for the allied forces. But the war had lasted a long time. The people of Paris had seen many starts toward victory, and as many reverses. Such things might occur again. But there was one element that had never before entered the fight as a definite factor that now was a dominant feature, the American Expeditionary Force.

Headquarters of various staffs of the A. E. F. sprang up everywhere in Paris. The need for intelligent interpreters was never fully supplied, and as Billy became more widely known his services were constantly in demand. He was very busy as well as a very happy Boy Scout.

The greatest cloud upon his happiness was the loss of his uncle, Major Deschamps. Madame Deschamps had now returned to Paris, feeling that the Major was either dead or in a German prison.

One day in August Despard came to see Billy.

"I come for news of your esteemed uncle, Major Deschamps," said Pierre.

"We have no news. And I suppose you have none of your brother Jacques."

"None whatever. Either he is dead, or worse than dead — captured."

"I don't think that is worse than being dead. I hear that the Germans are now treating their prisoners better."

"And of whom do you hear such news? One prisoner escaped and reached us, it is a week since. There was a fire. The guards were busy saving themselves. But he alone of a large camp of prisoners had enough strength to travel. He says nothing of improved conditions."

"It is a shame," agreed Billy. "It is another dark blot that will stain the German name for long years to come. We treat the Germans well when we hold them as prisoners. So do the French, don't they?"

"We do not pet them," said the Frenchman, with

a grin and a shrug, "but at least we give them as good fare as goes to our own soldiers."

"Now that the Germans are driven back, Pierre, and the territory of the cave is again in our possession, I wish that you would guide me there. I would like to see the place."

"Why should you wish it? Know you not that a party of our men examined the cave the very day that the Boches were driven back? There had been no one there for days. Spider webs were grown across its mouth. Know you not that when the men who could walk left that cave with my so sorely wounded brother in the charge of your splendid uncle, there was food only for a few days?"

"But I want to see it anyway," persisted Billy.

"I want to see it just because my uncle was there,
if for no other reason."

"Ah, it is for the sentiment! I ask you will pardon me. For me the place has no sentiment but that of hatred, for I spent there three days and nights of misery. But for you it is different. To-morrow we will go."

It was not much of a journey now that this region was no longer fighting ground and could be traveled without the dread that every tree concealed an ambush. They traveled by motor cycle as far as

the road would carry them, and then went the remaining six miles that had taken the relief party two nights to cover in little more than two hours.

"Here it is," said Pierre at last. "Here is the big tree and below it the heavy brush that concealed the mouth of the cave. It is still well hidden, is it not?"

"Well, I think I could find it without very much trouble," replied Billy. "See, the brush is trampled down in this direction, and it seems to lead straight to an opening."

"Ah, it was nothing like this of old!" protested Pierre. "Our men who searched the cave no doubt were careless, for they considered that now the Boche is driven back we shall need caves no more."

Billy had a pocket flash, but Pierre carried an armful of dry wood into the cave for lighting purposes.

"We can make a blaze, for there is good ventilation," said he. "The only reason we could have no fire while shut up here was because we dared not let smoke be seen or smelled."

By the light of the fire Billy saw a room about twelve feet high, twelve feet wide, and running so far back that he could not see its depth.

"A good many men could stay in here," he said.

"There were fourteen of us when I was here," said Pierre. "One man was insane, four were dying, and the other eight were all wounded worse than I. The cave seemed like a vast place in the rear, so we all huddled up close to the mouth, and up there we seemed crowded. The insane man was pretty bad at times, but the night after I left to get help he broke away."

"But that was before my uncle, Major Deschamps, arrived, wasn't it?"

"He did not come until after I had carried my message for help. No doubt he organized the arrangements of the cave much better."

"I think that was where he slept," said Billy, pointing with his torch to a pile of sand that had been gathered into the semblance of a bed, upon a projecting ledge.

"No," said Pierre, "that would be his table where the patients were placed, perhaps. The Major would care little about a bed of sand. He has been too long in the field."

"Here is a shelf!" cried Billy, feeling around over the supposed table.

He turned the flash light upon it and was rewarded by finding several small articles that had undoubtedly belonged to the Major. Under such

circumstances articles of this nature assume a very precious value, but the thing that stirred Billy most was a little book in which the Major had made numerous notes.

Billy read these precious notes eagerly:

"June 26. Vann died to-day. Jones has just left with the two men, Jean Sutier and Jules Levy. They are physically able to get through unless Sutier starts a serious hemorrhage. I have food enough to last two men for six days by careful rationing. I need count only myself and Jacques Despard, for Lemartre is eating nothing and can live only a day or two. If the miraculous happens and our forces retake this ground in a week, we are safe. Despard will get well but cannot be moved for three or four weeks.

"June 27. Lemartre still lives but is very feeble. Thank God the water is plentiful, for he constantly calls for it.

"June 28. Lemartre died this morning and I buried him with the others at the rear of the cave. Despard is easier now that he is no longer disturbed by Lemartre's cries.

"June 29. A German patrol searched around here this morning. I could see and hear enough to know that they were of the 201st Division, 402nd

Regiment. Our food is holding out better than I anticipated, but Despard is now able to eat more.

"June 30. All quiet to-day. I managed to snare two small birds in the brush at the entrance. Everything helps.

"July 1. Despard improves every day. He may be able to travel in two weeks. But he must have more to eat.

"July 2. Snared a rabbit to-day. They are numerous now that this part of the wood is quiet. But they are hard to catch.

"July 3. Germans in here again. It seems that they have been driven back. These men are of the Signal Corps and are establishing communication.

"July 4. A good day. I would like to be in Paris to help Billy celebrate. Everything quiet here."

"July 5. No more men have appeared but there is much noise of artillery. Despard still improves. So does his appetite. I must get food to-day.

"July 6. Snared a rabbit again but I fear at great expense. I was seen by some Germans of the same 402nd Regiment, which is apparently encamped near here, having been beaten back. It is worth the risk to see Despard eat.

"July 7. The 402nd have a company kitchen not

a hundred yards away. To-morrow I will see how well it is kept.

"July 8. Raided the kitchen. Enough food for a week. But they will be furious, for they feel keenly a blow at the stomach. They will search everywhere. Despard is walking to-day. He is a surprise to me, that man.

"July 9. They will find us soon, for they have brought dogs to nose out the trail. Despard says he will die before he will surrender. But that is foolish with so many against us. He certainly would have died had he been found two weeks ago, for a move would have been fatal, but now he may live. He gains in strength every day."

That was the last entry in the notebook. Billy searched everywhere through the cave for something that might give later information. But aside from the few articles on the dark shelf, everything had been carried away.

"You may well be glad that we came, Despard," said Billy. "Here is good news for both of us. Your brother had reached the place where he might live. It is better to be a German prisoner than to die of wounds or be starved to death."

"Not better," objected Pierre. "It's about the same thing."

"I don't agree with you," said Billy. "I think the men are prisoners and I expect to see my uncle again. The fighting will soon be over now."

"Every year since 1914 we have thought that," said Pierre gloomily.

"But it is sure now," said Billy. "The German retreat is steady. We will keep them on the go. By the spring of 1919, not later, we will make our final victorious drive."

"Will your uncle or my brother be living then?" asked Pierre.

"Why not? We will find where they are and send things to them. If the Germans of the 201st Division captured them we can find out soon, perhaps, because many of the soldiers of that division are our prisoners in Paris."

"It is true," admitted Pierre. "At a prison camp nera Versailles I know that there are Germans from this very regiment."

"Let us hurry back and see them," said Billy. "I can hardly wait to hear what they have to say."

Whatever may be said of German soldiers as soldiers, both French and Americans agree that they make excellent prisoners. At this time there were Germans all over France doing valuable service. Usually they were very docile. Most of them were

so happy to be safely out of the fighting that they made no attempt to escape. Not only were they used in great numbers to do the labor of the army camps and to work on public roads and buildings, but they were even sent out singly or in small groups to do work on the farms of the country.

They were a common sight to Billy. Usually they wore old uniforms that had been dyed green and might have been used by any army; but the German cap was retained. They could be distinguished at a great distance by the large white letters that were placed on their outer garments. These letters were either P. G. or P. W. If it was P. G. you knew that they were prisoners of the French, for the initials meant "Prisonnier de Guerre"; P. W., "Prisoner of War", and indicated that the men were prisoners of British or American forces.

When Billy went to the prison camp near Versailles he learned that the men of the 402nd Regiment were among a company that had been detailed to do janitor work at a large public building occupied by no less a personage than the minister of war.

Billy gained admission to the building without trouble. The prisoners were white-washing a large

hall. The only one not at work was a sergeant who had charge of them under a French sergeant.

"Will you interpret for me?" Billy asked the French sergeant. "I don't know much German."

"You won't need it," said the sergeant. "Their sergeant speaks French and English as well as you do."

Billy turned to look at the man pointed out, and a thrill swept through him as he recognized the man Marson, who had formerly pretended to act as interpreter for the 199th while really a German spy.

"I know that man," he said. "He ought to have a good deal to say to me."

As soon as Billy faced Marson he felt that the man recognized him, in his Scout uniform, so he made no effort to conceal his identity.

"What do you want of me now?" growled Marson. "Haven't you done enough?"

"I don't think I've ever done anything to you but break up your spying on American troops," replied Billy. "This time I want a service of you. I want you to tell me about my uncle, Major Deschamps, who was captured by your regiment in a cave somewhere about July 9. Do you know about it?"

The man's eyes flashed with cunning. "Supposing that I do have information about your uncle,

the Major, my scout; do you think it is to give away? Not so. But it is for exchange."

"What do you mean by exchange?"

"I mean that I favor you by telling truly all that I know of the Major, his state of health, where he has been sent, how to reach him by mail. You, in turn, favor me by forgetting that you ever saw me before. Simple, is it not?"

"Perhaps it is," said Billy, "but I'm making no rash promises. It can't hurt you if I get the advice of some older person than myself about this."

"Yes it can. That older person might tell. It can make no difference to you how I'm classified so long as I am a prisoner. But it makes a lot of difference to me. Now I am a captured soldier, allowed a great deal of liberty and treated well. If they should listen to your story and classify me as a spy—well you know how spies are treated."

"All very well," replied Billy, "but I must be fair to France."

"You forget, boy; the war is about over. And if you keep quiet I have information of value for you. Why not be reasonable?"

"It does sound reasonable," Billy admitted.
"I'm sure of just one thing, though — there can't be any trading between me and the enemy."

In a short time he was back at the prison camp telling the commandant about Marson.

"It's just as well you didn't listen to him," said the officer, "if for no other reason than that he has been our prisoner since the sixth of June and could have told you nothing. It is never safe to rely greatly upon information obtained from such men. We want that man and I'll see that he is taken care of. We have a number of prisoners of the 402nd Regiment of more recent capture who are men of good character. I will question them."

Billy never did learn in what manner the commandant secured his information, but that evening he was overjoyed to be able to carry to his aunt and to Pierre Despard these addresses.

"Communications and packages for Major Deschamps should be sent to Prison Camp for French officers, Metz; for Jacques Despard, Block 2, Dulmen Prison Camp."

CHAPTER XVIII

BIRTHDAY GIFTS

September 12 was Billy Ransom's birthday. But even to Billy the importance of this event was overshadowed by the fact that the American troops were beginning their attack on St. Mihiel salient.

The excitement all over France was intense. Rumors of all kinds were in circulation. At one hour one heard that the American forces were being repulsed with great losses. At another they had taken sixty thousand prisoners. Then came the wild rumor that the Germans had evacuated Metz and the war was practically over. And thus the excitement was kept at fever pitch.

There were no dull days in Paris at that time. The war was within sixty days of its end, but no one in Paris, either French or American, realized that such could be the case. They had become habituated to war. They had seen many fluctuations. It did not seem possible that it could end so very soon.

But next year, the great spring drive of 1919, surely would be the end.

Meantime all war preparations were maintained at high pressure. There was no let up in vigilance in any direction. The training of the soldiers was continued steadily. The food regulations were maintained. The rules against the display of lights at night remained. Vigilance against spies was very strict.

In a morning paper Billy read a warning to the people to be on their guard against all strange uniforms. Spies had lately been discovered under many new disguises. They were masquerading as officers and soldiers of the allied armies, even the American, and in some cases they had been discovered wearing obscure uniforms such as had belonged to petty monarchies long extinct. It was supposed that the spies favored the uniforms of army officers because they were a passport to many public buildings. To recognize every one of the great diversity of uniforms worn by those who filled the streets of Paris at this time a person must indeed have been well informed.

Birthday presents had scarcely been in Billy's calculations for this birthday, so far away from home. Nevertheless, he was not forgotten. His

aunt, Madame Deschamps, had arranged a little morning party for him. She had been compelled to make it a picnic breakfast because she was on duty in the afternoon. Two or three French Boy Scouts whom Billy liked very well, and Sergeant Rooney were the guests.

"I'm sure sorry that I didn't know this was a birthday, Billy," said Rooney. "I couldn't have bought you a present, for we haven't seen a pay day for four months, but I want to give you a little gift that I picked up at the front. Some German officer dropped it in his hasty flight, I reckon. Or maybe he threw it away so he wouldn't be identified. It's a German officer's identification book with photograph. Nice souvenir, eh? Just a youngster of about your age, but he doesn't look like you."

"What age have you, Billee," asked one of the French scouts.

"Sixteen," replied Billy. "This fellow looks nearer twenty. Thank you for the souvenir, Sarge. I haven't a thing like it. I didn't look for any birth-day presents this far away from home. But what do you think my mother sent me? My aunt kept it hidden until to-day."

[&]quot;Gold watch," guessed Rooney.

[&]quot;Nothing like that. Anyway, I have a good

watch. She sent me this new Scout suit I'm wearing. I told her how my old suit had worn out, and how, much as I honored the French Scouts, it was hardly the thing for me to be wearing their uniform, so she sent me a new outfit."

"What's the difference, Billy? I thought all the scouts everywhere wore the same uniform."

"There is very little difference, but just enough so you can notice. The most difference is in the breeches. Here the scouts all wear 'shorts'. And so they do in England and in some parts of America. But around my home, the scouts all wear long breeches and generally leggings or wrap puttees. I like it because it makes us look more like our soldiers, and I'm American enough to want every one to know it."

"Thought you spent most of your time trying to talk like a Frenchman," said Rooney.

"Well, I am proud of my French. And I do talk your language pretty well, don't I, fellows?"

"You talk very French, Billee. You speak very perfectly," he was assured.

"But my best birthday gift is coming this evening. My father is to be here at six o'clock. I am to meet him at the Gare du Nord."

"That's fine, Billy. I'd like to see your father. I

never have seen him because, you remember, I didn't cross in the same boat with you, and he has never been in Paris while I've been here."

"I would like all of you to meet my father," said Billy. "Come back at eight o'clock to-night and you shall see him."

No one was content to stay very long away from the bulletin boards on that twelfth day of September, once the news of the advance had begun to come through to the Paris press, so the party was not prolonged.

Billy and Sergeant Rooney went together to the *Herald* office. The French boys were going to the office of *Le Matin*.

There is an old saying that boys will be boys, and I suppose it is as true of French boys as of the boys of America.

These French boys were very good boys. They loved their country and they worked for her. They loved fun and they allowed no opportunities to be lost.

- "What think you of Billee in his new American Boy Scout clothes?" asked one.
- "I like them not," was the reply. "A scout is better as we are."
 - "They look foreign," said another. "See, here

is Oscar Depere of the Secret Service. I will tell him that Billee is one of those wearers of strange uniforms and is to be kept under observation."

Depere was a solemn, elderly man who had been given a minor post in the secret service because he was too old for army service.

"He will not escape me," he said, after the boys had pointed Billy out in the throng around the *Herald* office.

The old man was not lacking in perseverance and a certain degree of ingenuity. He kept Billy under his eye through a rather busy day. It was not until our scout had returned from a message delivered to a chemist at one of the laboratories of the Sorbonne that he decided to arrest him. This chemist was under suspicion. Therefore the visit of Billy to the laboratory was suspicious. Later in the afternoon, when he had taken plenty of time to think it over, he made his decision.

"Come with me," he said to Billy. "I am of the secret service."

Billy was not backward about going, for though he had few dealings with the French Secret Service, he was quite willing to give help.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"Come along. That is all. I am taking you to the Bureau."

"But why?" asked Billy. "What do they want with me?"

"That you will discover later," said Depere.

"This is very funny," said Billy. "I am a Boy Scout on duty at Red Cross Headquarters."

"I have information to the contrary," said Depere.

"That is not a Boy Scout uniform. March along!"

At the Bureau it happened to be a relief period during which the officer in charge was a man somewhat of the caliber of Depere.

"It is one of those strange uniforms of which we are warned, without doubt," he agreed. "He must be held and searched."

"It is a Boy Scout uniform," cried Billy.

"I have seen Boy Scout uniforms many times. I cannot be deceived."

"But this is the uniform of an American Scout."

"We are especially warned against spies who are impersonating Americans."

"I'm not a spy," insisted Billy.

"Perhaps not, but you have a strange accent for a Frenchman."

This was quite a blow to Billy, who had supposed his French to be beyond criticism.

"I have as good an accent as you," he retorted.

This happened to be correct, for the officer was an Alsatian. But it was a rash thing to say, and one that did not react in Billy's favor, since the old gentleman also prided himself on a perfect accent.

"We shall see if you have as good credentials," said the officer. "Search him, Depere."

Billy indignantly began to turn out the contents of his pockets upon a table. There was not the usual assortment of articles since he had just put on the new suit and had transferred only the essentials. But there was one thing that he overlooked. The new blouse had an inside pocket and in that he had bestowed for safer keeping the souvenir of the German officer's identification book presented by Sergeant Rooney. It was the first thing found by Depere when he began his examination. He held it forth with a dramatic air.

"Here is the key to the mystery," he exclaimed.

"Did you think Oscar Depere would overlook such evidence?"

"No. I forgot it was there. It was just given to me this morning. You can see that it is not my picture. It doesn't look like me in the least."

"That is the art of it!" exclaimed Depere. "You can't fool old hands with this kind of stuff. Had you looked like the picture I might have doubted, but you are so different that it is very evident that you are disguised. We shall see."

"We shall see," repeated the desk officer. "You will go with the rest of them. The prefect himself will examine you to-morrow."

"But I cannot wait until to-morrow; I have important things to do to-night."

The officers only smiled.

"At least you will send a note for me by a messenger. I have money. I will pay."

This much it seemed might be granted, but the note must be written in French. Billy did not wish to alarm his aunt, nor was he sure that he could reach her. He was more anxious to reach his father than anything else, so decided to write his note to Sergeant Rooney at his hospital, asking him to meet his father at six o'clock and bring him to the station. Fortunately Rooney could read French.

This done, Billy was passed through a barred door into another compartment of the same room, where were collected behind a grating some dozen suspects whom officer Depere and his coworkers had managed to bag that day.

Billy looked around on the group with some apprehension. He was not used to close connection with spies and other criminals. He was keeping a brave front but not without a great deal of effort, for he had heard much of the power of the French secret service and knew it to be quite possible that a person should be lost forever to the world after having once come into their hands.

The little compartment was rather crowded and he was obliged to sit on one end of a seat already occupied by two men.

He dozed after awhile, but he was not so much asleep that he could not hear the men whispering. They were using English because there seemed to be no one of that nationality in the room.

"One o' these cheap Germans," he heard.
"Young under-lieutenant of some kind, judging from the identification book they found on him. We couldn't use him for anything. It's the people higher up that we're after."

"But he might tell us whom to deal with."

"Wouldn't try it. Wouldn't trust him. They've got nothing on us. We'll be let loose to-morrow. Then we can go to the real people here in Paris and make our own terms. No good dealing with any small fry this boy might send us to.

"I'd like to try, though. I venture to say he could tell us how to reach the high-up ones here. You don't understand the perfection of this German system."

"Maybe not. But I understand what we have to dispose of and I don't intend to trust any boy like that. Wait until to-morrow. Magnuson will know."

The name Magnuson gave Billy the clue that he had been seeking. It was not an everyday name, nor one to be forgotten in a few hours. Magnuson was the name of the chemist to whom he had carried a message that day, the man who was experimenting with lethal gas at the Sorbonne. And this man who had something that he was willing to sell to the Germans had been in conversation with Magnuson. He must have been arrested shortly thereafter.

It had grown dusk in the little cell, and Billy was relieved to have the gas lighted. He took a good look at the man whose voice he had recognized. Then he was quite sure of him. It was now more important than ever that he should obtain his liberty so that he might use the information he had gained. He looked at the clock. It was of the kind that

showed the time to be twenty minutes past eighteen o'clock.

Just then a taxicab pulled up at the door and to Billy's great relief he heard the voice of his father, Dr. Ransom. A few words of explanation, and Billy was again allowed to pass through the door in the grating.

"Your present got me into trouble, Sarge," he said to Rooney. "So it's only fair that you should get me out. I certainly can't thank you enough. I was afraid I was in for life."

As soon as they were well outside Billy told his father of the men who had something to sell to the Germans. Dr. Ransom had rather close acquaintance with those high in the French Secret Service. Experienced officers were soon detailed to give the case proper attention.

It was long after eight o'clock when Billy with his father and Sergeant Rooney reached the home where the morning picnic had been held. Billy was surprised to find his scout friends waiting to meet his father.

"I beg your pardon a thousand times, fellows," he said "I've had such exciting experiences to-day that I'm ashamed to say I forgot you. I've been arrested, but it has helped me to detect a couple of

men who were going to sell important secrets. Worse still, these men were British subjects and they were turned over to British officers. In just a little while I'm to go all the way to England to give evidence — just the very place I've been wanting to go. I'm so excited I almost forgot to ask the last news from St. Mihiel."

"The last news from St. Mihiel is still very good, Billee. There is no doubt that many prisoners have been taken and everything is a grand success. Bonne chance for you Americans! You are always what you call 'lucky.'"

CHAPTER XIX

A FELLOW NAMED SWARTZ

It was in October, 1918, that Billy Ransom went to London. He had a wonderful visit, but he was glad to get back to France, where so much was going on at that time. The Argonne offensive was well under way. Our men were gaining every day, and paying dearly for their gains. If the fighting was to go on in this way, a foot at a time, the war certainly wouldn't be over soon. But Austria was asking for a separate armistice, and Germany was making all sorts of proposals of her own, so perhaps peace was not such a forlorn hope, after all.

A very important personal matter to Billy was the fact that his father, Dr. Ransom, after months of work in other countries, had now been definitely assigned to Red Cross work in France. He was to be stationed as the representative of the American Red Cross at a large hospital center not very far from the important city of Nantes. So Billy

would have the opportunity to be with his father for almost the first time since he had been in France.

Billy got back to Paris from England just in time to start with his father to the new post. Their train arrived at Nantes at about six o'clock in the morning and made only a short stop at that city. Dr. Ransom had a little business in Nantes that kept him for almost an hour. Then it was discovered that the next train which would carry them to their destination did not leave until late in the afternoon.

"We'll have to go by automobile, then," said Dr. Ransom. "It is less than twenty-five miles, and I can't afford to waste a whole day."

"There's a troop train that will start in about half an hour," said the R. T. O. "It has only about two hundred men, but we're going to run it special to the hospital center so that the men won't be getting in there at night."

"Are they wounded men?" asked Billy.

"No, they are men of the medical corps, just over. There was a big trainload of them came up from Bordeaux. Most of them stay at Nantes, but this bunch, one field-hospital crowd and one ambulance company, go on to the place you're going."

"Wonder if there are any fellows that I know

among them," said Billy. "I used to know a lot of men in the medical corps."

"I'd say it isn't very likely you know any of these," replied the R. T. O. "They aren't your kind. They are the dregs of the draft. Any men that were no good for anything else seem to have been shoved into the medical corps and sent over with this special lot. 'Wops', draft evaders, conscientious objectors—all kinds. We are mighty glad to ship them along."

"You can't tell much from just looking at a bunch of men traveling in French pony pullmans," said Billy. "If they've traveled up from Bordeaux in them, it's a wonder they look like soldiers at all. Let me go see them, father. Maybe they'll let me ride with them."

"All right, Billy. I'm pretty sure you'll get your passage. I'll see the commanding officer."

"There are four second-class coaches for the officers," said the R. T. O. "They have only twelve officers, so they can give seats to both of you, if you wish."

"I suspect that Billy prefers to get acquainted with the men," said Dr. Ransom, "but I'll go see what the second-class coaches look like."

Billy found the men strung along the track near the box cars in which they had been traveling.

"Wouldn't your men like a wash, Sergeant?" he asked of the top sergeant.

"They sure would," was the reply. "Where's your bathroom?"

"Just around the corner is a faucet with a good hose. Send your men along in single file and I'll wash their hands and faces for them."

It was a very satisfactory job, though done without either soap or towels. Billy had them all done in twenty minutes, at the end of which time he himself was pretty well splashed and soaked, for the men had not been particular how they spattered the water around.

"You're a good scout, son," said the top sergeant. "What can I do for you?"

"You might let me ride with you the rest of your trip. I want to go to the hospital center."

"Well, I'm sure glad to find somebody as wants to go there. Most of us are spending our time choosing language strong enough to tell how much we don't want to go."

"Where do you want to go?"

"We want to go to the front. We're afraid this war'll be over before we get into it."

- "Do you all feel that way?"
- "All that I know anything about. That's what we came over for, isn't it?"
 - "I heard you had a lot of foreigners."
- "Foreigners? We've got everything. Wops and Dagoes, even one born in Germany. But a fellow can't help the place he was born. I was born in County Donegal, Ireland, but I'm a naturalized citizen of the United States, and nobody can tell I was born outside of it, if me name is Murphy."

At that moment an officer came down and ordered the men to entrain.

"Get aboard," said Murphy. "This car is my own private conveyance, so perhaps you'd better hop right into this one. Don't tip the porter."

Billy soon made the acquaintance of the group of men who were riding in Murphy's special. Among them he found the man of German birth, Emil Swartz. He paid particular attention to this man.

"What can you tell us about this hospital center we are going to?" asked Swartz.

"I've never been there," said Billy, "so I can't tell you very much. I've seen some other hospital centers, though. You see, it was found better in a good many ways to group the base hospitals

together. So they make a number of them into one hospital center. Then they put all the seriously wounded men in one hospital, the walking cases in another, the medical cases in a third, then the gassed cases, perhaps, and possibly the mentals. They can take care of more men with less equipment in that way. I think there are eight hospitals in the center to which we are going. Of course they don't have any base hospitals right up at the front — just field hospitals."

"But ours is a field hospital," objected Swartz.

"Even field hospital men aren't sent right to the front without training," explained Billy. "You will stay at this hospital center about six weeks for training and then you will go to the front."

"I'm feared this war's going to end before then," complained Swartz. "I'm trained already. I've been in the army medical corps over a year. I've only just got to France, but it's through no fault of mine."

"There are a lot of men at the front who would like to come back," ventured Billy.

"Yes, but they've been there. Maybe I'll be willing to come back after I've had a chance to show what I can do. Look here, kid, I was born in Germany. Why didn't my father stay there? It was

because he was a man who loved freedom and hated tyranny. So he emigrated to America. He brought me up with his feelings. But because I was born in Germany everybody thinks I'm a traitor. Every time the outfit I was in got ready to go across, they'd weed me out. Finally they got tired and let me through. But that ain't enough. I want to be right up at the front working under fire. I'll show 'em what kind of stuff Emil Swartz is made of!"

"I believe you will," said Billy. "I know a major who was born in Germany who has been in the hospital twice with severe wounds contracted in our service."

"There are plenty of us ready to be wounded for the Flag," continued Swartz. "But people don't do a thing but suspect us, just the same. Do you know that probably one fourth of the men in our army have names that are German? I've heard that there is one American division — one of our best in which forty-one per cent. of the men are Americans either born in Germany or of direct German descent. Look at the names just recommended for the D. S. C. Where do they get Blohm, Schwab, Kuehlman, Baer, Scholtheis, and Werner?"

"You put up a good story," said Billy. "It isn't necessary to convince me, for my father has taught

me from the beginning of this war that a man's loyalty depends more on himself and his own manhood than on where he was born. But I'm glad you have such a good argument, for there are lots of other people who need it. One man just told us that this outfit was all foreigners."

"He's mistaken," said Swartz. "I doubt if we have more men of foreign birth than you will find in almost any outfit that happens to have been recruited from one of our big cities. The man just doesn't realize what a big percentage of people of foreign birth America has. He would be surprised to know that our army has over three hundred thousand Italians, sixty thousand Greeks, sixty thousand Czechoslovaks, thirty thousand Lithuanians, besides men of some twenty other nationalities. He'd be surprised to know that from ten to fifteen per cent. of the army is of German birth or descent."

"You're right," said Billy. "My father can tell you a lot about those things. You'll meet him because he is going to be Red Cross representative at the hospital center."

"How far is that place?"

"Only a few miles, I reckon. I'm expecting to see the hospital buildings pretty soon."

But they did not see any hospital buildings until

they had entered the quaint old French village which formed the hospital town. This village was nearly two thousand years old. It had been used as a base of supply by Julius Cæsar in his wars. Its main road was the old Roman road that his men had built. There were no young men in the place. Some of the old ones looked as if they might have been left behind by Cæsar.

But when they marched up past the village to the location of the hospital center they found young men in plenty. They were American soldiers of the best; the men of the medical corps who were doing duty at the various hospitals of the hospital center. But far more interesting to Billy than these stalwart young Americans were the thousands of wounded American soldiers whom they served.

Very soon Billy became a familiar figure at the hospitals of this center. Without having any specific duties assigned to him, he was always busy and always in demand. If he had a spare moment he liked best to go into wards A and B in which were the amputation cases and do some service for the friends he had there.

The field hospital in which Emil Swartz was enrolled went into temporary quarters very close to these special amputation wards, each of which was

in a long, one-storied wooden building. Swartz was assigned to Ward A for temporary duty. He was somewhat of a mechanical turn of mind and soon showed a perfect genius in the adjustment of the Thomas splints that were so much used.

"Where's Swartz?" the patients would cry. "I want Swartz to come and fix my leg. He knows just how."

Swartz was greatly pleased at this popularity. He worked uncomplainingly more hours than any man in the ward. But he did not falter in his wish that the day might soon come when he could go to the front.

Billy found Swartz to be a good fellow in every way, and was always glad to help him in Ward A. The thing about which they centered their ambitions for the time being was to get as many Ward A men as possible ready to go to the opening entertainment of the Red Cross Auditorium, just constructed.

The new building was splendid. The programme would be magnificent, for some great artists had been secured in honor of the occasion. It was agreed that all patients capable of bearing transportation to the building should be honored with places at the very front, next the stage.

When the great day came, Billy and Swartz man-

aged to get thirty of their patients to the Auditorium. Some were able to use crutches, but not a few were carried over. The Auditorium was soon crowded to its utmost capacity.

Billy was always granted privileges, so it was not surprising that he was allowed behind the scenes. A couple of men were needed to manage the temporary curtains that screened the stage, since the permanent "drop" had not yet been received. So Billy contrived that Swartz should be admitted as one of these men.

The entertainment was a tremendous success. It was the first relaxation of this nature for most of these men, since they had left their own land. Their pleasure was intensified by the fact that many of the performers were the great artists of their own land.

The evening drew to a close. It was the last act. Something was required involving a display of fire, simple enough under ordinary circumstances, but more difficult at this time because of the newness of everything.

No one dreamed of danger. The curtains were drawn across the stage, the audience breathlessly waiting for the next act. Suddenly there was a bright flash, the noise of a slight explosion, and

flame shot out from the stage and seized upon one half of the curtain.

Billy saw that in some way the temporary drop curtain, a massive thing of inflammable material, had been set on fire. It was raging up toward the roof. If its supports gave way it would fall out over the audience, full upon the helpless Ward A patients, who were utterly unable to help themselves.

Vaguely he was conscious of the general excitement that prevailed. He saw officers and men hurrying to the rescue. He could hear voices in the audience shouting "Tenshun!" and commanding men to stay in their seats. But the big, overwhelming, calamitous thought was of the blazing curtain that might drop any moment upon his helpless friends.

Billy rushed toward the flame, but there was one quicker than he. He was pushed violently aside, and as he picked himself up it was to see Private Swartz tear the blazing curtain from its supports and jump bodily upon the great, flaming mass, stamp upon it, crush it, and beat it with a piece of canvas held in his bare hands, as if he were a salamander over whom flame had no power.

Swartz had saved the Auditorium. He had saved from a terrible catastrophe those thirty patients of Ward A whom he had so proudly conveyed thither. And possibly he had saved hundreds of others. But he was obliged to pay the penalty.

Billy watched beside him in some of those terrible days that followed. He suffered greatly, but fortunately he was unconscious much of the time.

"I guess I didn't do so badly for a fellow named Swartz, Billy?" he whispered in one of his conscious moments. "But I guess I will never get to the front line now."

Nevertheless, two days later Private Swartz was at the front.

CHAPTER XX

THE HUNDREDTH PRISONER

And so the War was really over! It was beyond belief. Scarcely any of the A. E. F. men believed it possible until a very few hours before the Armistice was really signed.

It seemed too good to be true that there was actually a possibility that war would be over before Christmas. Every one had been counting on getting through the winter in the best way possible, and then ending the war with a mighty sweep in that tremendous offensive that was planned for the spring of 1919. What a gloriously fine thing it would be if no such costly drive were needed! But who could believe it? It was too good to be true.

Billy Ransom lived in this atmosphere of hope and uncertainty for several weeks. As November crept along the conviction became more and more settled that the end was at hand. Fighting still continued, but it might be stopped at any hour.

The feverish days slipped by. Each day it became more and more evident that the Germans would sign, and at last came the joyful news that eleven o'clock of the morning of November 11 would put at least a temporary end to hostilities.

"Won't it be awfully hard lines," said Billy, "if some fellow gets killed or badly wounded at about five minutes before eleven on the eleventh?"

"That is likely to happen to some man, though," said his father.

It happened that not one but many men were wounded in the fighting of that last eventful day, and some on both sides were killed. Billy was to see some of the wounded in the hospital in later days and hear their wonderful stories of the last hours of conflict.

On the historic morning of the eleventh of November, 1918, Billy and Dr. Ransom rode into the city of Nantes, early in the morning, in a Red Cross car. Nantes is a real city. Its population had been increased by some forty thousand Belgian refugees, so that it numbered nearly a quarter of a million inhabitants.

Always a lively place, the excitement and commotion on this particular day exceeded anything that Billy had seen in France. The houses and

buildings were emptied of inhabitants. All were out in the streets to join in the hurrah, to watch the bands and parades, to shout, to exult, to try to realize in some slight measure that the War was actually over and that they were victors.

A band of daring French aviators were making exhibition flights over the city. They would soar almost out of sight, then they would drop suddenly down in a descent that was nothing less than a swoop, coming lower and lower until the merry-hearted, watching crowd would break and scatter in all directions, save for some few knowing soldiers who had seen that kind of thing before. Just before starting on their upward flight they generally threw some printed matter to the people below.

Doctor Ransom and Billy sat in their car in the Place du Commerce and watched these maneuvers. It certainly seemed that the great wings would smash into the top of their car. But in another second the machine was again mounting steadily upward, leaving the crowd of people in the square scrambling for the printed souvenirs.

"I'm going to get one of them," exclaimed Billy.
"I want to see what it says."

He jumped over the side of the car and ran into

the midst of the crowd. Only a few of the printed slips remained, but being young and agile, Billy was able to snatch one of the few.

He stood in the square examining it with great interest.

Avec Des Assassins,
Avec Des Incendiaires,
Avec Des Voleurs,
On Ne Discute Pas
On Les Juge!
Souvenez — Vous!

Ligue pour perpetuer, à travers les âgés, le souvenir des crimes allemands.

It showed that although the War might be over, the people of France were not willing to settle down to amiable forgetfulness of the things they had gone through. It was not surprising to Billy; he could feel with these French people. Was not his own Uncle Henri at this moment a prisoner of the Germans, perhaps subject to all manner of indignities? No, they would not forget easily. Still, he thought, they might be Christian enough to forgive.

But suddenly, even as Billy was examining the paper, the bells of the great clocks sounded eleven o'clock, and the whole city went suddenly mad. Eleven o'clock of November 11, 1918! Never

before had such an eventful hour sounded. Never again would it be heard. The fight was ended. The ancient enemy of France was vanquished. There would be no more fighting, no more war, no more lists of killed and wounded, no more separation from home and kindred. Prisoners would be coming home, troops would be demobilized, families would be reunited, little children would learn to know their fathers, men who had been absent for years would return to their beloved soil.

Yes, there was much on the other side, too; many, many who would not return. But this was no time to think of them. This was the hour of jubilee.

Men threw their hats and coats into the air and shouted "Vive la France!" Women sobbed in each other's arms. Any man in uniform was in danger of being kissed and hugged, and faced the peril of being smothered to death with affection.

Billy Ransom wore the khaki of the Boy Scouts of America. It was enough for the enthusiastic crowds that he was of the United States. A crowd rushing through the square at a gallop picked him up and carried him along. He was lifted on to the shoulders of a big mechanic who had evidently rushed straight from his work, for he wore only

undershirt, trousers, and heavy wooden shoes. Everywhere was noise and confusion. Steam whistles were blowing, automobile horns tooting, bands playing, people shouting, flags waving, soldiers marching, and the air was filled with fine confetti.

When Billy was let down he was minus several buttons that had been detached from his blouse for souvenirs; he had been kissed by a dozen women and men, he had been thumped and slapped and embraced and urged to drink and the farther he went the more of this treatment he faced.

The door of a substantial building bearing the sign of the French Red Cross stood open, and he slipped quietly inside, just in time to evade the caress of a particularly fat and ancient French-woman.

Here was one place that had escaped the confusion. It was rather dark after the bright sunshine outside, and the only noises were those that came in from the street.

Billy recognized the building as one to which he had been brought by a very clever Frenchwoman, Madame Gazin, on a previous visit to Nantes.

All that he wanted to do was to slip out through the rear of the premises into a quieter street and

from there make his way back to the place where his father waited for him. But, passing an open door, he was surprised and very much pleased to see his old friend, Madame Gazin.

"It is Billy Ransom, my scout, is it not?" said she. "But they have treated you roughly, my Billee."

"It is nothing but fun," responded Billy. "But I can't afford to lose any more buttons until I get back to camp. On such a great day the people may do whatever they like. All I want is to get back to my father at the Place du Commerce."

"Very well, Billee. I will show you how you may get there quietly. I am leaving in a short time for the Gare d'Orléans. I will tell you a secret. We have word that the Germans are planning to release our men who are so unfortunate as to be their prisoners, in such a way that it will be hard for the poor, starved, weak men to get back to their friends. Think of them being turned loose on the frontier to make their own way on foot for forty or fifty miles in this November weather! Many of the weak will die. I am one of those who go to see what help can be given."

"Can I help?" asked Billy.

Madame Gazin looked at him critically. "You

are almost a man, Billee," she said at last. "You have grown so broad and tall you are almost a man. I believe you can help much. But I must tell you that it is not without danger, this trip. And it will be very uncomfortable travel after we leave Paris."

"I can do anything that a woman can do," replied Billy. "And I'm not used to traveling in comfort."

He ran off by a quiet way pointed out by Madame Gazin, found his father in the Place du Commerce, and readily secured permission to go.

"I'll keep an eye open for Uncle Henri, you may be sure," he promised his father as he left.

An hour later he was riding at top speed to Paris with Madame Gazin.

In Paris Madame Gazin secured a French Red Cross truck loaded with supplies of all kinds that were likely to be needed by the freed prisoners. They were able to make pretty good time by avoiding the roads that were badly cut up. On the evening of the second day they approached Nancy.

The rumor that had reached Madame Gazin had received ample confirmation. Already little bands of released prisoners, coming in twos and tens and twenties, were struggling into Nancy. These were

the stronger men, well able to walk, or else a fortunate few who had not had far to journey on foot.

But there were hundreds of weak, sick, and crippled men lingering along the road, and some dying by the wayside. Men who would find five miles a hard day's march had been turned loose on the border, thirty miles from sustenance, without proper shoes or clothing, and without rations other than a little black bread. They lined the roads to Metz, to Nancy, and to all the border towns.

At an old camp outside Nancy they found a company of French soldiers who were employed in cleaning the place and putting it in readiness to receive as many of the returning men as possible.

"Are you an American?" the officer asked Billy.

"Yes, indeed," replied Billy.

"You will find some of your countrymen at the concentration camp," said the officer. "They have need of all you can give them."

The camp was not far away. Billy could hardly believe that the rough group of men wearing odds and ends of all kinds of uniforms, German caps and even German helmets in some cases, could be American soldiers. But the uproarious cheers with which they hailed the U. S. flag that hung from the truck soon convinced him. Billy would have been glad

to unload all that he had for these boys, but Madame Gazin objected. They were all sound and in good strength. The mission of the Red Cross supplies was to those who had fallen by the wayside.

Billy gave out enough supplies to cheer the hearts and stomachs of these cheerful doughboys, and then they drove off again to search for those in greater need.

All night long they searched the roads that led from the frontier to Nancy. A cold wind was blowing and a dreary rain falling, but these only made their work more imperative. Load after load they picked up and carried to shelter, until over forty exhausted prisoners who had literally dropped by the wayside had been rescued. Men able to travel, they supplied with food and left to make their own way.

It was after four o'clock in the morning, and they had just brought to the Red Cross hospital five crippled men whom they had picked up twelve miles out, when Billy discovered that they were out of gasoline and he could get no more until daylight.

"We shall rest two hours, then," said Madame Gazin.

Billy stretched himself on the long seat of the truck, or camion, and in spite of cold and discom-

fort was asleep in less than a minute. Had they attempted another trip that night he might have gone to sleep at the steering wheel.

Early in the morning they started again. A cold rain fell all day, but the main roads were not impassable. So many wayfarers did they find, utterly unfit for the journey yet struggling feebly on, that it seemed quite impossible to cease their work.

Night came again. It was now three nights that Billy had been deprived of his regular rest, and he was very weary.

"I will get another driver," suggested Madame Gazin. "It is too hard work for you."

"It is no harder for me than for you," protested Billy. "If I feel sleepy all I've got to do is to think of those poor crippled, sick fellows, out in the rain and mud and cold, struggling along on their sore feet, and I wake right up. We only lack five of having brought in a hundred. Let's go back and get the five, anyway."

So they started once more and this time they drove ten miles before finding a man who needed their aid. Another half mile and they found two poor fellows who told them of a companion whom they had been obliged to leave in the lee of a hedge while they trudged on for succor. This fourth man

was in a serious state. They could take only one more.

A full mile they journeyed, anxiously watching the road as it opened up to their headlights.

"It is enough," said Madame Gazin at last. "Let's go back to Nancy."

"But we have room for one more," objected Billy. "How I hate to think of neglecting some man who may be dragging himself along, almost within our reach!"

Just then Billy stopped the car, because he saw at the roadside a uniformed figure lying very still and quiet.

"I fear from his looks that we are too late for him," said Madame Gazin, for they had seen several bodies by the roadside whose spirits had left the wearied frames forever.

But Billy climbed down and ran over to the man.

"He is alive!" he shouted. "His body is warm, and his heart beats."

Then his own heart almost stopped beating in the great surprise that came as he heard this ragged, unshaved, mud-spattered veteran say in a faint voice, "Billy Ransom!"

"Oh, Madame Gazin, come quickly!" shouted Billy Ransom. "Oh, to think that we came near

going back without our hundredth man. He is my Uncle Henri, Madame. Major Deschamps of the French Army!"

CHAPTER XXI

BACK TO THE HOMELAND

After November 11, 1918, every American in France had the same desire,—to go home. A few months before, the longing had been to get over to France. "We're going over" had been the popular song. Now one could strike no more popular chord than "The day when I'll be going down that long, long trail with you."

Billy Ransom was suddenly seized with an intense homesickness. He wanted to go home so badly that he really thought that he could not live in France one single week longer. Yet days, even months went by, and Billy still lingered. His going depended upon his father, and the American Red Cross still had important duties for Major Ransom to perform in France.

"I want to go home, father," pleaded Billy. "Can't you manage to get started? I'm sure your practice at home is all going to pieces."

"My practice at home has probably gone to pieces long ago," replied Dr. Ransom. "You'll have to hold yourself in a while longer, Billy. Every boy in the Army feels as bad or worse than you do, and that is one reason why the Red Cross is obliged to keep us where we can look after them. There are thirty thousand wounded American soldiers still in the A. E. F. hospitals, all pining to go home. Which of them do you want to give up his passage to you?"

That was rather a poser for Billy. He decided to keep quiet. Dr. Ransom sent him to Paris to see his Uncle Henri, who had recovered his health and strength and had been discharged into the army reserve, so that he was able to give much attention to seeing that his nephew had a good time.

Then one day in May came a telegram from Major Ransom: "Sailing on hospital ship Mercy for U. S. in charge of convoy of wounded. Come to St. Nazaire at once."

You may be sure Billy went. Billy found his father at St. Nazaire, for the hospital ship Mercy already lay in the basin, having come in on the high water of the previous night. Major Ransom was extremely busy. He was bringing three hundred litter cases from Hospital Center, and was to be in

charge of the convoy until it reached New York. This was only a small part of the *Mercy's* load, but the other patients were already stowed away.

Billy was enchanted with the *Mercy*. Although so large a number of wounded were stowed away between her decks, there was not a dark or dismal corner to be seen. Everywhere were comfortable beds, generally in two tiers, all of them clean, all of them light, and all of them well ventilated.

There were wonderful operating rooms equal to those of the best hospitals of New York. On special occasions they had been the scene of successful surgical operations of very intricate character. The Mercy was a credit to the United States. It was a special honor to be one of her passengers.

Then came disaster. Billy could not go! The Mercy must sail without him.

It was not discovered until the last moment. Major Ransom was very busy embarking his wounded men. This was done with the greatest precision, and in spite of the fact that the men were wounded soldiers, they were scrutinized carefully and each man checked against the passenger list before being allowed to embark. If the man were too sick to answer for himself, a hospital sergeant responded for him.

Everything checked successfully, even to the equipment of the "mental cases", who were quite irresponsible. The attendants were all at hand. The officers were assigned to their cabins. The checking officer looked up from his list with a smile of relief.

Then his face took on a look of perplexity. "I don't see your boy's name on the passenger list, Major Ransom," said he.

"It must be there!" exclaimed Major Ransom.

"The evacuation officer told me distinctly that Billy would be included as a special attendant. I have his identification card and physical examination and everything right here."

"Everything's all right but the passenger list," said the officer. "His name is not on it."

"What can I do?" said Major Ransom. "We have scarcely an hour before sailing time."

"The only thing to do is to see the commander of the port," said the officer. "No one else can give permission for us to add a name to the passenger list at this stage of affairs."

"But I can't take the chance of leaving my convoy so near to sailing time," said Major Ransom.

"No, I'm afraid not," admitted the officer.

Major Ransom drew to one side for consultation

with some of the medical officers. "Will one of you gentlemen go with Billy to the commanding general and explain the situation?" he asked.

There was no immediate response. They were all American doctors who had been away from home for many weary months. It would be a terrible thing if they missed this sailing.

"Stow him in one of our cabins, Doctor," advised one. "It's a poor rule that can't be broken occasionally. He'll be all right."

"No, I can't do that," said Dr. Ransom slowly.
"I don't believe Billy would want me to do that; would you, son?"

It took Billy a long time to shake his head. "Not if you couldn't do it on the square, father," he gulped out at last.

"He's right, too," said a young lieutenant.

"You'll have to lie about it from start to finish, or else get into no end of trouble. I'll go with Billy and we'll see the commanding general."

Lieutenant Bell had a young wife waiting for him at home, as well as a little boy he never had seen. Billy felt the greatness of his sacrifice and determined that the Lieutenant should not be the loser.

An ambulance that still lingered at the dock took

them across the bridge and over the cobbled streets to port headquarters at top speed.

Lieutenant Bell was a persuasive young officer. He managed to work his way into the presence of the adjutant in short order, where he told his story quickly and clearly.

"Sorry," replied the adjutant. "I really am very sorry, indeed. But we've had so much trouble with petitions to add names to passenger lists at the last minute, and so often has it been discovered that the names presented were not entitled to passage, that it is absolutely forbidden. The only one who could grant permission is the general himself.

"And where is he?" asked Lieutenant Bell.

"He went to Nantes in his car this morning. He expected to be back before the Mercy sailed. I expect him any minute."

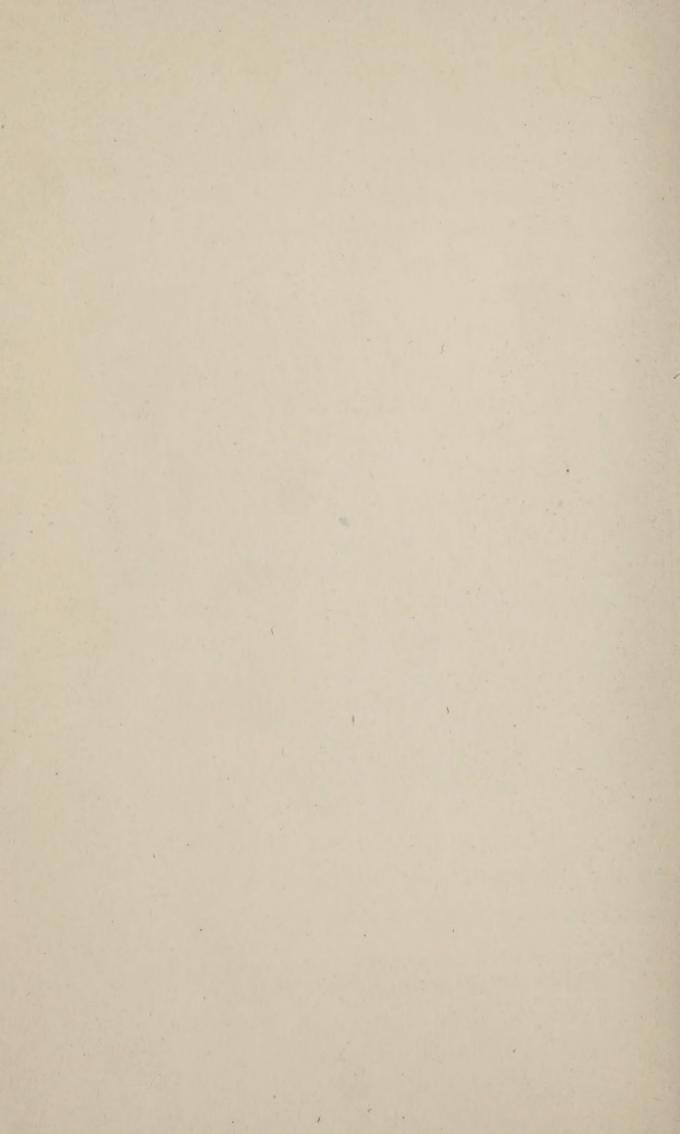
Lieutenant Bell sat silent, but Billy spoke up.

"You go back to the Mercy, Lieutenant," he urged. "You have done everything possible. Tell my father that if I cannot get permission in time to sail on the Mercy, I will call on the Red Cross to help me back to Paris, and Uncle Henri will arrange for my passage. Go on. You must not miss sailing on the Mercy."

And Billy, with tears in his eyes, was watching



An officer pinned on Billy's chest the famous French Croix de Guerre. Page 261.



the very last speck of the *Mercy* skipping away over the blue waters when at last the commanding general returned to headquarters.

Uncle Henri met Billy in Paris the next morning at half-past seven.

"It's good that you didn't go, Billy. I have a surprise in store for you — something I just heard of yesterday."

Two days later he took Billy to the headquarters of the French Army, where an officer pinned on Billy's chest the famous French Croix de Guerre.

"It is for the services you rendered with the Second Division. Your friend, Madame Gazin, is responsible. She was so pleased with the way you helped her bring in the men who had been in the German prison camps on that memorable occasion when you saved your uncle's life, that she determined you should have a medal. So since she could not get one for work done after the armistice, she presented the other record. Now aren't you glad you stayed?"

Billy tried to assent, but his heart denied it. He was proud of the Croix de Guerre, but the thing he wanted more than all other things was to get back home.

Major Deschamps redoubled his efforts to secure

the required passage for the boy, but every one in the A. E. F. was trying to return home at the same time, and there seemed no room for Billy.

Then, quite unexpectedly, came a wire from the adjutant at St. Nazaire, with whom Billy left his address. He had remembered the plucky boy, and, finding a single vacancy on the S. S. Mongolia, chose Billy to fill it.

This time Major Deschamps went with Billy to St. Nazaire to see him safely aboard the vessel.

"The only way to send you was as civilian employee attendant to some mental cases," said the adjutant. "There won't be much to do after you get started, but just now you must get up into that little cage on top of the sick bay and stay there with the patients until the vessel gets under way."

Billy climbed up gladly. He was not afraid of mental cases. Chiefly they were poor fellows who had found the rude shocks of war too much for them.

There he watched the embarkation of the troops. The *Mongolia* was carrying home four thousand men. Billy could hear the men calling their names to be checked on the passenger lists, and a glad throb came to his heart at the realization that his own name was surely written there.

Now that he was quite safe himself it was amusing to listen to the remarks that floated up.

"Speak up there! Hi, you boy, havent you got a name! Jones? Which Jones; I've got fifty on this list! Louder there. You haven't been shellshocked. Get that whisper out of your system."

Some of the names he could hear quite distinctly, some not at all. It became monotonous after a while, but suddenly he was brought back to sharp attention by hearing names that seemed familiar.

He listened sharply until there came some unmistakable names.

"McGiffon — Philip!" "Rooney — Theodore!"

"Jackson — Fred!" and at last there thundered in unmistakable and well-beloved tones: "McGiffon — William!"

Then Billy knew that he was actually going home with the 199th, and for the first time he was glad that he had not sailed on the *Mercy*.

It was early evening and the Mongolia was picking her way out to sea, before he caught his first glimpse of his old friends. He was standing at the rail near the sick bay, looking down on the mass of men grouped on the deck below. They were packed together so tightly that it seemed almost out of the question for any one to move. But from a point

just below him Billy noticed some activity, and soon they had cleared a narrow lane leading to a funnel against which one man "made a back", his head toward the funnel. Four other men followed suit so that five backs were down joined in a row. At the end of the cleared lane five men ranged themselves in readiness to spring upon the waiting backs.

"What are they going to do?" inquired an officer at Billy's elbow.

"I know," said Billy; "they're going to play 'Buck, buck, how many fingers do I hold up.' These five men at the back have to jump on the backs of the men who are down, and light in such a way that they can stay on. There they go. The last man on will hold up his fingers and call. See, he holds up three. Say, excuse me, but I know that man. I must holler before he gets away. Oh Sarge! Sergeant McGiffon! Look up this way. Here I am!"

The game was over then. A confused mass of men of the 199th came scrambling up to see their old chum, Billy Ransom; and when ordered down by an officer they dragged Billy down with them.

From that time on Billy spent all of his spare time with the 199th. They were going back home rather late, but in great spirits. "All the heroes have gone home already," said Sergeant Rooney. "The triumphal arches have cracked with the weather, the color in the bunting has all run together in the rain, the home folks have cheered so much they have nothing left but mild whispers, but all the same I guess every one of us knows one or two people who will be ready to give him a pat on the shoulder."

"I know a Mother McGiffon who'll go wild with delight at getting both of her boys back in good shape," said Phil McGiffon.

"And I reckon there'll be some of the Ransoms looking for a boy of that name," added Sergeant Bill. "If I ever get to see Mrs. Ransom, I'm going to tell her some things about that boy that'll make her turn pink with pleasure."

Never will Billy forget the night that the Mongolia approached New York harbor. The boys had been watching for hours that they might catch their first sight of the Statue of Liberty, but darkness came and they were obliged to be content with seeing the lights of the city.

Early in the morning came the small boats and river tugs carrying friends of those on board. A great many men of the Keystone Division were on board, and delegations from Pennsylvania cities had

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come to greet them. A tug appeared in sight crowded with visitors. On her side she carried the banner: "Pittsburgh welcomes her heroes." From all over the little vessel the people thrust into sight small signs proclaiming greetings to individuals supposed to be on board the *Mongolia*.

"Welcome to Pvt. Henry Ricker." "Sergeant Joe Dapper. Love from Mother." "Asbury S. S. greets her boys."

At last to the joy of the 199th came a sign for their very own, "Waiteville waits for the McGiffon boys." As everyone knew that Waiteville was the McGiffon home town, the welcome was unmistakable, and the 199th was able to cheer without restraint.

Billy stood a little apart from the group and watched these thrilling greetings with unconscious tears streaming down his face.

"What you crying about, Billy?" asked Rooney, slapping his shoulders.

"I'm not crying," Billy asserted indignantly. And it was not until he was obliged to wipe the moisture from his cheeks that he realized what emotions the scene had stirred.

Truth to tell, Billy's crying did have just a little personal touch, for he had hoped that on one of

these visiting tugs might be his own father and mother.

But when the Mongolia docked a Red Cross officer from New York came to assist him with his baggage and tell him that both father and mother would greet him at the home town, which he would reach the next day at noon.

"All right," said Billy. "I did hope one of them would come here. But what's one day after all the waiting I've done?"

A little before noon of the next day Billy was peering out of the open car window. Hadn't the porter just shouted: "Maytown! The next station, Maytown?"

What a joy it was to get back once more to that little town! It had been a big town two years before, when Billy left it. But he had traveled in the largest cities of the world in the interval, and he now knew that it was only a little place; little, but the dearest place in all the world.

Would the Maytown people remember him? Would they be glad to see him? Would they think he had done justice to his upbringing? Or would they just say: "Why, hello, Billy! Haven't seen you for a long time. Been away somewhere?"

Well, he would soon know. He could see the

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station now. There was a crowd on the platform as when the governor's special came through. Perhaps some big man had his private car on the back of this train and was going to make a two-minute talk. Must be something of the kind because there was actually a band on the platform, playing "The Long, Long Trail." Well, he'd get to see a lot of people all at once, anyway.

Billy, baggage in hand, had been ready to go ever since they passed the last station.

He ran to the steps and jumped off into the crowd. Yes, father was there and mother was there, and everybody but the band was shouting and yelling and thrusting out his hands at him—at Billy Ransom!

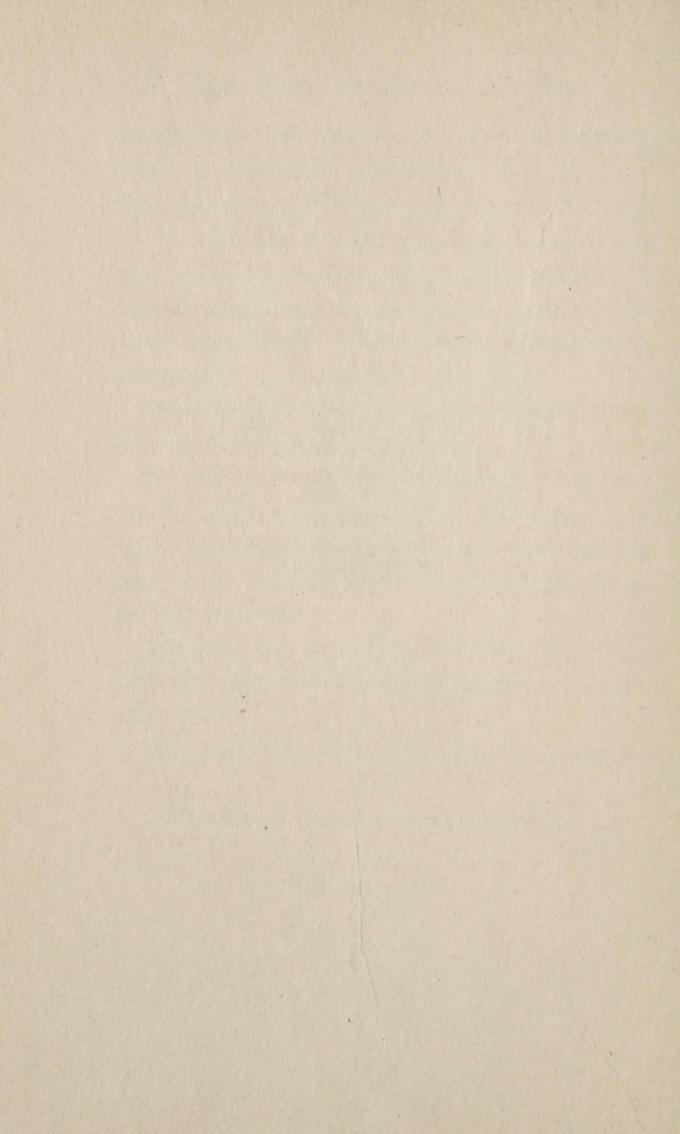
And what was that big banner, done in red and blue and gold? He could hardly believe his eyes, for it read:

MAYTOWN WELCOMES HER CROIX DE GUERRE HERO!

WELCOME HOME TO BILLY RANSOM!

[THE END]





THE BOY SCOUTS ON CRUSADE

By LESLIE W. QUIRK

Author of the "Wellworth College Series," and "The Black Eagle Patrol Series" Illustrated

HIS is the story of how the Black Eagle Patrol turned sleepy Lakeville into a wide awake town. Jump Henderson, billed on the circus posters as the youngest of an aerial casting troupe, called it a "hick" town when he was left there to grow up with normal boys; and it required a long summer of planning and accomplishing to make him change his opinion—or his character. But in the end the scouts managed to do both.

The efforts of the patrol are neither prosy nor miraculous. From the moment they encounter the circus wagons halting for a rest till they carry the town's bid for a factory in a race against time through a wild, unknown country, there is action and sport and play and adventure in heaping measures.

"The Boy Scouts on Crusade" offers all the humor and seriousness, all the thrills and joys and complications, that may reasonably be expected in an intimate account of the lives of real boys during a summer crammed with unusual incidents.

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THE BOY SCOUTS OF BLACK EAGLE PATROL

By LESLIE W. QUIRK.

Author of "The Wellworth College Series."

Illustrated.

The first volume in Mr. Quirk's Boy Scout series is the story of the eight boys of the Black Eagle Patrol, with a ninth "outside" boy thrown in for good measure, together with a girl, the scout master, a burglar, and several inevitable grownups. It is a spirited account of how the patrol caught the unknown hero in a horse-blanket while "fishing" for quite another youngster, reluctantly accepted the "scared rabbit" as a tenderfoot, nicknamed him "Bunny," and said uncomplimentary things about him until-well, until they discovered he was little in stature only. Before he became a first-class scout at the end, his career as a Black Eagle was as checkered as the kitchen apron the girl saw him wear while he tried desperately but unsuccessfully to make griddle-cakes. He learned to cook, rescued a doubter of his courage, freed an innocent man at a trial, saved an orchard from frost, built a house, won a game and a race, and did many other greater and lesser things with the aid of his fellow-scouts.

The story is full of rippling fun and thrilling tensity; of real boy problems at home, at school, and in the patrol itself; of dramatic situations and stirring adventures; of athletic stunts and exciting games; and of that kind of scoutcraft that is clean and informative by example without being preachy

or teachy.

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